

लाल बहादुर शास्त्री राष्ट्रीय प्रशासन अकादमी

L.B.S. National Academy of Administration

मसूरी

MUSSOORIE

पुस्तकालय

LIBRARY

अवाप्ति संख्या

Accession No.

22110 112116

वर्ग संख्या

Class No.

822

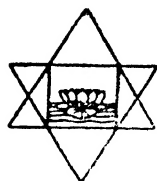
पुस्तक संख्या

Book No.

Aw

THE
VIZIERS OF BASSORA
A Dramatic Romance

SRI AUROBINDO



THE
VIZIERS OF BASSORA

A Dramatic Romance

SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY

1959

Publishers :
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY

First Impression--August, 1959

All Rights Reserved

Reprinted from:
Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual No. 18 of 1959

PRINTED IN INDIA
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM PRESS,
PONDICHERRY



451 (B) /59/1500

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This drama is one of the earlier works of Sri Aurobindo on a major scale. Written in Baroda, it has a curious history attached to it. Sri Aurobindo seems to have had an especial fondness for this youthful creation of his and so it was particularly mentioned in the Introduction to the Collected Poems and Plays as one of the two works—the other being a translation of Kalidasa's Meghaduta (Cloud-Messenger)—that had been lost in the course of the many turmoils and vicissitudes that a busy political life had meant in India at the beginning of the century.

The Kalidasa-manuscript is still untraced. But by a strange turn of destiny the drama, after it had lain buried in the Government archives for nearly fifty years, was recovered and saved—thanks to the alert curiosity of a record-keeper—just as it was being disposed of as waste paper. The notebook in which it had been written was an exhibit in the famous Alipore Conspiracy Case, and it still bears the seals and signatures of a British Court of Justice as the page printed here in facsimile will show. The manuscript is a neat copy in the author's own hand and has been well preserved in spite of its age and the treatment to which it was subjected.

The story of its salvage is told in some detail in the Appendix by Sri S. C. Chakrabarti, Judge, Alipore.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

<i>Haroun al Rasheed :</i>	Caliph.
<i>Jaafar :</i>	his Vizier.
<i>Shaikh Ibrahim :</i>	Superintendent of the Caliph's gardens.
<i>Mesrour :</i>	Haroun's friend and companion.
<i>Mohamad bin Suleyman of</i> <i>Zaymi :</i>	Haroun's cousin, King of Bassora.
<i>Alfazzal Ibn Sawy :</i>	his chief Vizier.
<i>Nureddene :</i>	son of Alfazzal.
<i>Almuene bin Khakan :</i>	second Vizier of Bassora.
<i>Fareed :</i>	his son.
<i>Salar :</i>	confident of Alzayni.
<i>Murad :</i>	a Turk Captain of Police in Bassora.
<i>Ajebe :</i>	nephew of Almuene.
<i>Sunjar :</i>	a Chamberlain of the Palace of Bassora.
<i>Aziz :</i>	merchants of Bassora.
<i>Abdullah :</i>	
<i>Muazzim :</i>	a broker.
<i>Azeem :</i>	steward of Alfazzal.
<i>Harkoos :</i>	an Ethiopian eunuch in Ibn Sawy's house- hold.
<i>Kareem :</i>	a fisherman of Bagdad.
<i>Slave, Soldiers, Executioners.</i>	
<i>Ameena :</i>	wife of Alfazzal Ibn Sawy.
<i>Doonya :</i>	his niece.
<i>Anice-aljalice :</i>	a Persian slave-girl.
<i>Khatoon .</i>	wife of Almuene, sister of Ameena.
<i>Balkis :</i>	sisters, slave-girls of Ajebe.
<i>Mymoona :</i>	
<i>Slave-girls</i>	

Act I.

Bassora.

Scene I. An antechamber in the Palace.

Murad; Sumpar.

Mur. Chamberlain, I tell thee I will not bear it an hour longer than it takes my feet to carry me to the King's audience-room and my voice to number my wrongs. Let him choose between me, a man and one made in God's image, and this brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape whom he calls his Vizier.

Sump. You are not alone in your wrongs; all Bassora and half the Court complain of his tyrannies.

Mur. And as if all ~~this~~ were too little for his heavy-handed malice, he must saddle us with his son's misdoings too, who is as like him as the young baboon is to the adult ape.

Sump. It is a cub, a monkey of mischief, a rod on the soles would go far to tame. But who shall dare apply that? Murad, be wary. The King, — who is the King and therefore blameless, will not have his black angel dispraised. Complain rather to Alfagzal ibn Saay, the good Vizier.

ACT I

Bassora

SCENE I

An antechamber in the Palace

Murad, Sunjar

Murad

Chamberlain, I tell thee I will not bear it an hour longer than it takes my feet to carry me to the King's audience-room and my voice to number my wrongs. Let him choose between me, a man and one made in God's image, and this brutish amalgam of gorilla and Barbary ape whom he calls his Vizier.

Sunjar

You are not alone in your wrongs ; all Bassora and half the Court complain of his tyrannies.

Murad

And as if all were too little for his heavy-handed malice, he must saddle us with his son's misdoings too, who is as like him as the young baboon is to the adult ape.

Sunjar

It is a cub, a monkey of mischief, a rod on the soles would go far to tame. But who shall dare apply that? Murad, be wary. The king,—who is the king and therefore blameless,—will not have his black angel dispraised. Complain rather to Alfazzal Ibn Sawy, the good Vizier.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Murad

The kind Alfazzal ! Bassora is bright only because of his presence.

Sunjar

I believe you. He has the serenity and brightness of a nature that never willingly did hurt to man or living thing. I think sometimes every good kindly man is like the moon and carries a halo, while a chill cloud moves with dark and malignant natures. When we are near them, we feel it.

Enter Ibn Sawy

Ibn Sawy
(to himself)

The fairest of all slave girls ! here's a task !
Why, my wild handsome roisterer, Nureddene,
My hunter of girls, my snare for hearts of virgins,
Could do this better. And he would strongly like
The mission ; but I think his pretty purchase
Would hardly come undamaged through to the owner.
A perilous transit that would be ! the rogue !
Ten thousand golden pieces hardly buy
Such wonders,—so much wealth to go so idly !
But princes must have sweet and pleasant things
To ease their labours more than common men.
Their labour is not common who are here
The Almighty's burdened high vicegerents charged
With difficult justice and calm-visaged rule.

Sunjar

The peace of the Prophet with thee, thou best of Viziers.

Murad

The peace, Alfazzal Ibn Sawy.

Ibn Sawy

And to you also peace. You here, my Captain ?
The city's business ?

Murad

Vizier, and my own !
I would impeach the Vizier Almuene
Before our royal master.

Ibn Sawy

You'll do unwisely.
A dark and dangerous mind is Almuene's,
Yet are there parts in him that well deserve
The favour he enjoys, although too proudly
He uses it and with much personal malice.
Complain not to the King against him, Murad.
He'll weigh his merits with your grievances,
Find these small jealous trifles, those superlative,
And in the end conceive a mute displeasure
Against you.

Murad

I will be guided by you, Sir.

Ibn Sawy

My honest Turk, you will do well.

Sunjar

He's here.

Enter Almuene

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Murad

The peace upon you, son of Khakan.

Almuene

Captain,
You govern harshly. Change your methods, Captain,
Your manners too. You are a Turk; I know you.

Murad

I govern Bassora more honestly
Than you the kingdom.

Almuene

Soldier ! rude Turcoman !

Ibn Sawy

Nay, brother Almuene ! Why are you angry ?

Almuene

That he misgoverns.

Ibn Sawy

In what peculiar instance ?

Almuene

I'll tell you. A city gang the other day
Battered my little mild Fareed most beastly
With staves and cudgels. This fellow's bribed police,
By him instructed, held a ruffian candle
To the outrage. When the rogues were caught, they lied
And got them off before a fool, a Kazi.

Murad

The Vizier's son, as all our city knows,
A misformed urchin full of budding evil,
Ranges the city like a ruffian, shielded
Under his father's formidable name;
And those who lay their hands on him, commit
Not outrage, but a rescue.

Almuene

Turk, I know you.

Ibn Sawy

In all fraternal kindness hear me speak.
What Murad says, is truth. For your Fareed,
However before you he blinks angelically,
Abroad he roars half-devil. Never, Vizier,
Was such a scandal until now allowed
In any Moslem town. Why it is just
Such barbarous outrage as in Christian cities
May walk unquestioned, not in Bassora
Or any seat of culture. It should be mended.

Almuene

Brother, your Nureddene is not all blameless.
He has a name !

Ibn Sawy

His are the first wild startings
Of a bold generous nature. Mettled steeds,
When they have been managed, are the best to mount.
So will my son. If your Fareed's brute courses
As easily turn to gold, I shall be glad.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Almuene

Let him be anything, he is a Vizier's son.
The Turk forgot that.

Ibn Sawy

These are maxims, brother,
Unsuited to our Moslem polity.
They savour of barbarous Europe. But in Islam
All men are equal underneath the King.

Almuene

Well, brother Turk, you are excused.

Murad

Excused !

Viziers, the peace.

Ibn Sawy

I'll follow you.

Almuene

Turk, the peace !

Ibn Sawy

Peace, brother. See to it, brother.

Exit with Murad

Almuene

Brother, peace.
Would I not gladly tweak your ears and nose

And catch your brotherly beard to pluck it out
With sweet fraternal pulls ? Faugh, you babblers
Of virtuous nothings ! some day I'll have you preach
Under the bastinado; you'll howl, you'll howl
Rare sermons there.

(seeing Sunjar)

You ! You ! You spy ? You eavesdrop ?
And I must be rebuked with this to hear it !
Well, I'll remember you.

Sunjar

Sir, I beseech you,
I had no smallest purpose to offend.

Almuene

I know you, dog ! When my back's turned, you bark,
But whine before me. You shall be remembered.

Exit

Sunjar

There goest thou, Almuene, the son of Khakan,
Dog's son, dog's father, and thyself a dog.
Thy birth was where thy end shall be, a dunghill.

Exit

SCENE II

A room in Almuene's house

Almuene, Khatoon

Khatoon

You have indulged the boy till he has lost
The likeness even of manhood. God's great stamp
And heavenly image on his mint's defaced,
Rubbed out, and only the brute metal left
Which never shall find currency again
Among his angels.

Almuene

Oh always clamour, clamour !
I had been happier bedded with a slave,
Whom I could beat to sense when she was froward.

Khatoon

Oh, you'd have done no less by me, I know,
Although my rank's as far above your birth
As some white star in heaven o'erpeers the muck
Of foulest stables, had I not great kin
And swords in the background to avenge me.

Almuene

Termagant,
Some day I'll have you stripped and soundly caned
By your own women, if you grow not gentler.

Khatoon

I shall be glad some day to find your courage.

Enter Fareed, jumping and gyrating

Fareed

Oh father, father, father, father, father !

Khatoon

What means this idiot clamour ? Senseless child,
Can you not walk like some more human thing
Or talk like one at least ?

Almuene

Dame, check once more
My gallant boy, try once again to break
His fine and natural spirit with your chidings,
I'll drive your teeth in, lady or no lady.

Fareed

Do, father, break her teeth ! She's always scolding.
Sometimes she beats me when you're out. Do break them,
I shall so laugh !

Almuene

My gamesome goblin !

Khatoon

You prompt him
To hate his mother ; but do not lightly think
The devil you strive to raise up from that hell

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Which lurks within us all, sealed commonly
By human shame and Allah's supreme grace,—
But you ! you scrape away the seal, would take
The full flame of the inferno, not the gusts
Of smoke jet out in ordinary men ;—
Think not this imp will limit with his mother
Unnatural revolt ! You will repent this.

Exit

Fareed

Girl, father ! such a girl ! a girl of girls !
Buy me my girl !

Almuene

What girl, you leaping madcap ?

Fareed

In the slave-market for ten thousand pieces.
Such hands ! such eyes ! such hips ! such legs ! I am
Impatient till my elbows meet around her.

Almuene

My amorous wagtail ! What, my pretty hunchback,
You have your trophies too among the girls
No less than the straight dainty Nureddene,
Our Vizier's pride ? Ay, you have broken seals ?
You have picked locks, my burglar ?

Fareed

You have given me,
You and my mother, such a wicked hump
To walk about with, the girls jeer at me.
I have only a chance with blind ones. 'Tis a shame.

Almuene

How will you make your slavegirl love you, hunch ?

Fareed

She'll be my slavegirl and she'll have to love me.

Almuene

Whom would you marry, hunchback, for a wager ?
Will the King's daughter tempt you ?

Fareed

Pooh ! I've got
My eye upon my uncle's pretty niece.
I like her.

Almuene

The Vizier, my peculiar hatred !
Wagtail, you must not marry there.

Fareed

I hate him too
And partly for that cause will marry her,
To beat her twice a day and let him know it.
He will be grieved to the heart.

Almuene

You're my own lad.

Fareed

And then she's such a nice tame pretty thing,
Will sob and tremble, kiss me when she's told,

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Not like my mother, frown, scold, nag all day.
But, dad, my girl ! buy me my girl !

Almuene

Come, wagtail.

Ten thousand pieces ! 'tis exorbitant.
Two thousand, not a dirham more. The seller
Does wisely if he takes it, glad to get
A piastre for her. Call the slaves, Fareed.

Fareed

Hooray ! hoop ! what a time I'll have ! Cafoor !

Exit, calling

Almuene

'Tis thus a boy should be trained up, not checked,
Rebuked and punished till the natural man
Is killed in him and a tame virtuous block
Replace the lusty pattern Nature made.
I do not value at a brazen coin
The man who has no vices in his blood,
Never took toll of women's lips in youth
Nor warmed his nights with wine. Your moralists
Teach one thing, Nature quite another; which of these
Is likely to be right ? Yes, cultivate,
But on the plan that she has mapped. Give way,
Give way to the inspired blood of youth
And you shall have a man, no scrupulous fool,
No ethical malingerer in the fray;
A man to lord it over other men,
Soldier or Vizier or adventurous merchant,
The breed of Samson. Man with such youth your armies.
Of such is an imperial people made
Who send their colonists and conquerors

Across the world, till the wide earth contains
One language only and a single rule.
Yes, nature is your grand imperialist,
No moral sermonizer. Rude, hardy stocks
Transplant themselves, expand, outlast the storms
And heat and cold, not slips too gently nurtured
Or lapped in hothouse warmth. Who conquered earth
For Islam ? Arabs trained in robbery,
Heroes, robust in body and desire.
I'll get this slavegirl for Fareed to help
His education on. Be lusty, son,
And breed me grandsons like you for my stock.

Exit

SCENE 3

The Slave Market

*Muazzim and his man; Balkis and Mymoona, Ajebe;
Aziz, Abdullah and other merchants*

Muazzim

Well, gentlemen, the biddings, the biddings ! Will you begin, sir, for an example now ?

Balkis

Who is the handsome youth in that rich dress ?

Muazzim

It is Ajebe, the Vizier's nephew, a good fellow with a bad uncle.

Balkis

Praise me to them poetically, broker.

Muazzim

I promise you for the poetry. Biddings, gentlemen.

A merchant

Three thousand for the pretty one.

Muazzim

Why, sir, I protest ! Three thousand pieces ! Look at her ! Allah be good to me ! You shall not find her equal from China to Frangistan. Seven thousand, say I.

Aziz

The goods are good goods, broker, but the price heavy.

Muazzim

Didst thou say heavy? Allah avert the punishment from thee, merchant Aziz. Heavy !

Balkis

(to *Ajebe*)

Will you not bid for me ? My mirror tells me
That I am pretty, and I can tell, who know it,
I have a touch upon the lute will charm
The winds to hear me, and my voice is sweeter
Than any you have heard in Bassora.
Will you not bid ?

Ajebe

And wherefore do you choose me
From all these merchants, child ?

Balkis

I cannot say
That I have fallen in love with you. Your mother
Is kind and beautiful, I read her in your face,
And it is she I'd serve.

Ajebe

I bid, Muazzim,
Five thousand for this little lady.

Muazzim

Five !
And she who chose you too ! Bid seven or nothing.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ajebe

Well, well, six thousand, not a dirham more.

Muazzim

Does any bid beyond ?

Merchant

Let me see, let me see.

Abdullah

Fie, leave them, man ! You 'll have no luck with her,
Crossing her wishes.

Merchant

Let her go, let her go.

Muazzim

To you, Sir, she belongs.

Balkis

But if you'll have me,
Then take my sister too; we make one heart
Inseparably.

Ajebe

She's fair, but not like you.

Balkis

If we are parted, I shall sicken and die
For want of her, then your six-thousand's wasted.

Muazzim

They make a single lot.

Ajebe

Two thousand more then.
Give her in that, or else the sale is off.

Muazzim

That's giving her away. Well, take her, take her.

Ajebe

I'll send the money.

Exit with Balkis and Mymoona

Abdullah

What, a bargain, broker ?

Muazzim

Not much, not much; the owner'll have some profit.

Aziz

The Vizier !

Enter Ibn Sawy

Abdullah

Noble Alfazzal ! There will be
Good sales today in the market, since his feet
Have trod here.

Merchants

Welcome, welcome, noble Vizier.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibn Sawy

The peace be on you all. I thank you, sirs,
What, good Abdullah, all goes well at home ?

Abdullah

My brother's failed, sir.

Ibn Sawy

Make me your treasurer.
I am ashamed to think good men should want
While I indulge in superfluities.
Well, broker, how's the market ? Have you slaves
That I can profit by ?

Muazzim

Admired Vizier,
There's nothing worth the kindness of your gaze.
Yet do but tell me what you need, I'll fit you
With stuff quite sound and at an honest price.
The other brokers are mere pillagers,
But me you know.

Ibn Sawy

If there's an honest broker,
You are that marvel, I can swear so much.
Now pick me out your sweetest thing in girls,
Perfect in beauty, wise as Sheban Balkis,
Yet more in charm than Helen of the Greeks,
Then name your price.

Muazzim

I have the very marvel.
You shall not see her equal in a century.

She has the Koran and the law by heart;
Song, motion, music and calligraphy
Are natural to her, and she contains
All science in one corner of her mind;
Yet learning less than wit; and either lost
In the mere sweetness of her speech and beauty.
You'll hardly have her within fifteen thousand;
She is a nonpareil.

Ibn Sawy

It is a sum.

Muazzim

Nay, see her only. Khalid, bring the girl.

Exit Khalid

I should not ask you, sir, but has your son
Authority from you to buy ? He has
The promise of a necklet from me.

Ibn Sawy

A necklet !

Muazzim

A costly trifle. "Send it to such a house",
He tells me like a prince, "and dun my father
For the amount. I know you'll clap it on
As high as Elburz, you old swindler. Fleece him !"
He is a merry lad.

Ibn Sawy

Fleece me ! The rogue !
The handsome naughty rogue ! I'll pull his curls for this.
The house ? To whom is it given ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Muazzim

Well, sir, it is
A girl, a dainty Christian. I fear she has given
Something more precious far than what he pays her with.

Ibn Sawy

No doubt, no doubt. The rogue ! quite conscienceless.
I'm glad you told me of this. Dun me ! Well,
The rascal's frank enough, that is one comfort;
He adds no meaner vices, fear or lying,
To his impetuous faults. The blood is good
And in the end will bear him through. There's hope.
I'll come, Muazzim.

Exit

Muazzim

The son repeats the father,
But with a dash of quicker, wilder blood.
Here's Khalid with the Persian.

Enter Khalid with Amice-aljalice

Khalid, run
And call the Vizier, he was here just now.

Exit Khalid. Enter Almuene, Fareed and slaves

Fareed

There she is, father; there, there, there !

Almuene

You deal, Sir? I know you well. Today be more honest than is your wont. Is she bid for ?

Muazzim

(*aside*)

Iblis straight out of Hell with his hobgoblin ! (*aloud*) Sir, we are waiting for the good Vizier, who is to bid for her.

Almuene

Here is the Vizier and he bids for her.
Two thousand for the lass. Who bids against me ?

Muazzim

Vizier Almuene, you are too great to find any opposers, and you know it; but as you are great, I pray you bid greatly. Her least price is ten thousand.

Almuene

Ten thousand, swindler ! Do you dare to cheat
In open market ? Two thousand's her outside.
This spindly common wench ! Accept it, broker,
Or call for bids; refuse at your worst risk.

Muazzim

It is not the rule of these sales. I appeal to you, gentlemen. What, do you all steal off from my neighbourhood ? Vizier, she is already bespoken by your elder, Ibn Sawy.

Almuene

I know your broking tricks, you shallow rascal.
Call for more bids, you cheater, call for bids.

Muazzim

Abuse me not, Almuene bin Khakan ! There is justice in Bassora and the good Ibn Sawy will decide between us.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Almuene

Us ! Between us ! Thou dirty broking cheat,
Am I thy equal ? Throw him the money, Nubian.
But if he boggle, seize him, have him flat
And powerfully persuade him with your sticks.
You, beauty, come. What, hussy, you draw back ?

Fareed

Father, let me get behind her with my horse-tickler. I will trot
her home in a twinkling.

Muazzim

This is flat tyranny. I will appeal
To the good Vizier and our gracious King.

Almuene

Impudent thief ! have first thy punishment
And howl appeal between the blows. Seize him.

Enter Khalid with Ibn Sawy

Muazzim

Protect me, Vizier, from this unjust man,
This tyrant.

Ibn Sawy

What is this ?

Muazzim

He takes by force
The perfect slavegirl I had kept for you,

And at a beggarly, low, niggard's price
I'd not accept for a black kitchen-girl ;
Then, when I named you, fell to tyrant rage,
Ordering his slaves to beat me.

Ibn Sawy

Is this true,
Vizier ?

Almuene

Someone beat out my foggy brains ?
I took it for a trick, a broker's trick.
What, you bespoke the girl ? You know I'd lose
My hand and tongue rather than they should hurt you.
Well, well, begin the bidding.

Ibn Sawy

First, a word.
Vizier, this purchase is not for myself ;
'Tis for the King. I deem you far too loyal
To bid against your master, needlessly
Taxing his treasures. But if you will,
You have the right. By justice and the law
The meanest may compete here. Do you bid ?

Almuene

(to himself)

He baulks me everywhere. (*aloud*) The perfect slave girl ?
No, I'll not bid. Yet it is most unlucky,
My son has set his heart upon this very girl.
Will you not let him have her, Ibn Sawy.

Ibn Sawy

I grieve that he must be so disappointed,
But there's no help. Were it my own dear son

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

And he should pine to death for her, I would not
Indulge him here. The King comes first.

Almuene

Quite first.
Well, shall I see you at your house today ?

Ibn Sawy

State business, brother ?

Almuene

Our states and how to join
Their linkèd loves yet closer. I have a thought
Touching Fareed here and your orphaned niece.

Ibn Sawy

I understand you. We will talk of it.
Brother, you know my mind about your boy.
He is too wild and rude ; I would not trust
My dear soft girl into such dangerous hands,
Unless he showed a quick and strange amendment.

Almuene

It is the wildness of his youth. Provide him
A wife and he will soon domesticate.
Pen these wild torrents into quiet dams
And they will fertilize the kingdom, brother.

Ibn Sawy

I hope so. Well, we'll talk.

Almuene

Fareed, come with me.

Fareed

I'll have my girl ! I'll beat them all and have her !

Almuene

Wagtail, your uncle takes her.

Fareed

Break his head then,
Whip the proud broker up and down the square
And take her without payment. Why are you
The Vizier, if you cannot do your will ?

Almuene

Madcap, she's for the King, be quiet.

Fareed

Oh !

Almuene

Come, I will buy you prettier girls than this
By hundredweights and tons.

Fareed

She has such hair ! such legs !
God damn the Vizier and the King and you !
I'll take her yet.

Exit in a rage, followed by Almuene & slaves

Muazzim

This is a budding Vizier !
Sir, look at her ; were mine mere broker's praises ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibn Sawy

You, mistress ! Does the earth contain such beauty ?

Muazzim

Did I not tell you so ?

Ibn Sawy

'Tis marvellous,
And if her mind be equal to her body,
She is an emperor's portion. What's your name,
Sweet wonder ?

Anice-aljalice

Anice-aljalice they call me.

Ibn Sawy

What is your history ?

Anice-aljalice

My parents sold me
In the great famine.

Ibn Sawy

What, is your mould indeed a thing of earth ?
Peri, have you not come disguised from heaven
To snare us with your lovely smiles, you marvel ?

Anice-aljalice

I am a slave and mortal.

Ibn Sawy

Prove me that.

Anice-aljalice

A peri, sir, has wings, but I have none.

Ibn Sawy

I see that difference only. Well now, her price ?

Muazzim

She is a gift to thee, O Vizier.

Ibn Sawy

Ceremony ?

I rate her value at ten thousand clear.

Muazzim

It is the price expected at your hands,
Though from a private purse we'd have full value.
Keep her ten days with you; her beauty's worn
With journeying and its harsh fatigues. Give rest,
Give baths, give food, then shade your eyes to gaze at her.

Ibn Sawy

You counsel wisely. There's my poaching rascal,—
But I will seal her fast even from his questings,
The peace, Muazzim.

Muazzim

Peace, thou good Vizier, loaded with our blessings.

Exeunt

SCENE 4

A room in the women's apartments of Ibn Sawy's house

Ameena, Doonya

Ameena

Call, Doonya, to the eunuch once again
And ask if Nureddene has come.

Doonya

Mother,

What is the use ? You know he has not come.
Why do you fret your heart, sweet mother, for him ?
Bad coins are never lost.

Ameena

Fie, Doonya ! bad ?

He is not bad, but wild, a trifle wild;
And the one little fault's like a stray curl
Among his clustering golden qualities,
That graces more than it disfigures him.
Bad coin ! Oh, Doonya, even the purest gold
Has some alloy, so do not call him bad.

Doonya

Sweet, silly mother ! why, I called him that
Just to hear you defend him.

Ameena

You laugh at me,—
Oh, you all laugh. And yet I will maintain

My Nureddene's the dearest lad in Bassora,—
Let him disprove't who can,—in all this realm
The beautifullest and kindest.

Doonya

So the girls think
Through all our city. Oh, I laugh at you
And at myself. I'm sure I am as bad
A sister to him as you are a mother.

Ameena

I a bad mother, Doonya ?

Doonya

The worst possible.
You spoil him; so do I; so does his father;
So does all Bassora,—especially the girls !

Ameena

Why, who could be unkind to him or see
His merry eyes grow clouded with remorse ?

Doonya

Is it he who comes ?

She goes out and returns

It is my uncle, mother,
And there's a girl with him,—I think she is
A copy of Nureddene in white and red.
Why, as I looked downstairs, she smiled up at me
And took the heart out of my body with the smile.
Are you going to have a rival at your years,
Poor mother ? 'Tis late for uncle to go wooing.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ameena

A rival, you mad girl !

Enter Ibn Sawy and Anice-aljalice

Ibn Sawy

Come forward, child.

Here is a slave girl, Ameena, I've bought
For our great Sultan. Keep her from your son,
Your scapegrace son. My life upon it, dame !
If he touches her, I'm gone.

Ameena

I'll see to it.

Ibn Sawy

Let a strong eunuch with a naked sword
Stand at her door. Bathe her and feed her daintily.
Your son ! see that he does not wheedle you.
You've spoilt him so, there is no trusting you,
You tender, foolish heart.

Ameena

I spoil him, husband !

Ibn Sawy

Most damnably. Whenever I would turn
Wholesomely harsh to him, you come between
And coax my anger. Therefore he is spoilt.

Doonya

Oh, uncle mine, when you are harsh, the world
Grows darker with your frown. See, how I tremble !

Ibn Sawy

Oh, are you there, my little satirist ?
When were you whipped last ?

Doonya

When you last were harsh.

Ibn Sawy

You shall be married off. I will not have you
Mocking an old and reverend man like me.
Whom will you marry, chit ?

Doonya

An old, old man,
Just such a smiling harsh old man as you,
None else.

Ibn Sawy

And not a boy like young Fareed ?
His father wishes it ; he too, I think.

Doonya

Throw me from this high window to the court
Or tell me ere the day and I will leap.

Ibn Sawy

Is he so bad ? I thought it. No, my niece,
You marry not with Khakan's evil stock,
Although there were no other bridegroom living.
I'll leave you, Ameena. Anice, I have a son,
Handsome and wanton. Let him not behold you !

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

You are wise and spirited beyond your years,
Above your sex ; I trust in your discretion.

Anice-aljalice

I will be careful, sir. Yet trust in bars
And portals, not in me. If he should find me,
I am his slave and born to do his will.

Ibn Sawy

Be careful, dame.

Exit

Ameena

How fair you are, small lady !
'Tis better truly he should see you not.
Doonya, be careful of her. I'll go before
And make your casket ready for you, gem.
Bring her behind me, Doonya.

Exit

Doonya

(leaping on Anice)

What's your name,
You smiling wonder, what's your name ? Your name ?

Anice-aljalice

If you will let me a little breathe, I'll tell you.

Doonya

Tell it me without breathing.

Anice-aljalice

It's too long.

Doonya

Let's hear it.

Anice-aljalice

Anice-aljalice.

Doonya

Anice,

There is a sea of laughter in your body ;
I find it billowing there beneath the calm
And rippling sweetly out in smiles. You beauty !
And I love laughers. Wherefore for the King ?
Why not for me ? Does the King ever laugh,
I wonder ?

She runs out

Anice-aljalice

My King is here. But they would give me
To some thick-bearded swart and grizzled Sultan
Who'd see me once a week and keep me penned
For service, not for mirth and love. My prince
Is like our Persian boys, fair-faced and merry,
Fronting the world with glad and open looks
That make the heart rejoice. Ten days ! 'tis much.
Kingdoms have toppled in ten days.

Doonya returns

Doonya

Come, Anice.

I wish my cousin Nureddene had come
And caught you here. What fun it would have been !

Exeunt

ACT II

Bassora

SCENE I

Ibn Sawy's house. An upper chamber in the women's appartments

Doonya, Anice-aljalice

Doonya

You living sweet romance, you come from Persia.
'Tis there, I think, they fall in love at sight ?

Anice-aljalice

But will you help me, Doonya, will you help me ?
To him, to him, not to that grizzled King !
I am near Heaven with Hell that's waiting for me.

Doonya

I know, I know ! you feel as I would, child,
If told that in ten days I had to marry
My cruel boisterous cousin. I will help you.
But strange ! to see him merely pass and love him !
Did he look back at you ?

Anice-aljalice

While he could see me.

Doonya

Yes, that was Nureddene.

Anice-aljalice

You'll help me ?

Doonya

Yes,

With all my heart and soul and brains and body.
But how ? My uncle's orders are so strict !

Anice-aljalice

And do you always heed your uncle's orders,
You dutiful niece ?

Doonya

Rigidly, when they suit me.
It shall be done although my punishment
Were even to wed Fareed. But who can say
When he'll come home ?

Anice-aljalice

Comes he not daily then ?

Doonya

When he's not hawking. Questing, child, for doves,
White doves.

Anice-aljalice

I'll stop all that when he is mine.

Doonya

Will you ? and yet I think you will, nor find it
A task at all. You can do it ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Anice-aljalice

I will.

Doonya

You have relieved my conscience of a load.
Who blames me ? I do this to reform my cousin,
Gravely, deliberately, with serious thought,
And am quite virtuously disobedient.
I almost feel a long white beard upon my chin,
The thing's so wise and sober. Gravely, gravely!

She marches out, solemnly stroking an imaginary beard

Anice-aljalice

My heart beats reassuringly within.
The destined Prince will come and all bad spells
Be broken; then—You angels up in Heaven
Who guard sweet shame and woman's modesty,
Hide deep your searching eyes with those bright wings.
It is not wantonness, though in a slave
Permitted, spurs me forward. O tonight
Let sleep your pens, in your rebuking volumes
Record not this. I am on such a brink,
A hound of horror baying at my heels,
I cannot pause to think what fire of blushes
I choose to flee through, nor how safe cold eyes
May censure me. I pass though I should burn.
You cannot bid me pick my careful steps !
Oh, no, the danger is too near. I run
By the one road that's left me, to escape,
To escape, into the very arms I love.

Curtain

SCENE 2

Ibn Sawy's house. A room in the women's apartments

Ameena, Doonya

Ameena

Has he come in ?

Doonya

He has.

Ameena

For three long days !
I will reprove him—Call him to me, Doonya.
I will be stern.

Doonya

That's right. Lips closer there !
And just try hard to frown. That's mildly grim
And ought to shake him. Now you spoil all by laughing.

Ameena

Away, you madcap ! Call him here.

Doonya

The culprit
Presents himself unsummoned.

Enter Nureddene

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

(at the door)

Ayoob, Ayoob !

A bowl of sherbet in my chamber.

(entering)

Well, mother,

Here I am back, your errant gadabout,
Your vagabond scapegrace, tired of truancy
And very hungry for my mother's arms.
It's good to see you smile !

Ameena

My dearest son !

Nureddene

Why, Doonya, cousin, what wild face is this ?

Doonya

This is a frown, a frown, upon my forehead.
Do you not tremble when you see it ? No ?
To tell you the plain truth, my wandering brother,
We both were practising a careful grimness
And meant to wither you with darting flames
From basilisk eyes and words more sharp than swords,
Burn you and frizzle into simmering cinders.
Oh, you'd have been a dolorous spectacle
Before we had finished with you ! Ask her else.

Ameena

Heed her not, Nureddene. But tell me, child,
Is this well done to wander vagrant-like

Leaving your mother to anxieties
And such alarms ? Oh, we will have to take
Some measure with you !

Doonya

Oh, now, now, we are stern !

Nureddene

Mother, I only range abroad and learn
Of manners and of men to fit myself
For the after-time.

Doonya

True, true, and of the taste
Of different wines and qualities of girls;
What eyes Damascus sends, the Cairene sort,
Bagdad's red lips and Yemen's willowy figures,
Who has the smallest waist in Bassora,
Or who the shapeliest little foot moonbright
Beneath her anklets. These are sciences
And should be learned by sober masculine graduates.
Should they not, cousin ?

Nureddene

These too are not amiss,
Doonya, for world-wise men. And do you think,
Dear Mother, I could learn the busy world
Here, in your lap, within the shadowy calm
Of women's chambers ?

Ameena

No, child, no. You see,
Doonya, it is not all so bad, this wandering.
And I am sure they much o'erstate his faults
Who tell of them.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Doonya

Oh, this is very grim !

Ameena

But, Nureddene, you must not be so wild;
Or when we are gone, what will you do, if now
You learn no prudence ? All your patrimony
You'll waste, — and then ?

Nureddene

Then, mother, life begins.

I shall go forth, a daring errant-knight,
To my true country out in faery-land;
Wander among the Moors, see Granada,
The delicate city made of faery stone,
Cairo, Tangier, Aleppo, Trebizond;
Or in the East, where old enchantment dwells,
Find Pekin of the wooden piles, Delhi
Of the idolaters, its brazen pillar
And huge seven-storied temples sculpture-fretted,
And o'er romantic regions quite unknown
Preach Islam, sword in hand; sell bales of spice
From Bassora to Java and Japan;
Then on through undiscovered islands, seas
And Oceans yet unnamed; yes, everywhere
Catch Danger by the throat where I can find him,—

Doonya

Butcher blood-belching dragons with my blade,
Cut ogres, chop giants, tickle cormorants,—

Nureddene

Then in some land, I have not settled which,—

Doonya

Call it Cumcatchia or Nonsensicum.

Nureddene

Marry a Soldan's daughter, sweet of eye
And crowned with gracious hair, deserving her
By deeds impossible : conduct her armies
Against her foemen, enter iron-walled
Cities besieged with the loud clang of war,
Rescue imperilled kingdoms, 'mid the smoke
Of desperate cities slay victorious kings,
And so extend my lady's empire wide —

Doonya

From Bassora to the quite distant moon.

Nureddene

There I shall reign with beauty and splendour round
In a great palace built of porphyry,
Marble and jasper, with stange columns made
Of coral and fair walls bright-arabesqued
On which the Koran shall be written out
In sapphires and in rubies. I will sit
Drinking from cups of gold delightful wine,
Watching slow dances, while the immortal strain
Of music wanders to its silent home.
And I shall have bright concubines and slaves
Around me crowding all my glorious home
With beautiful faces, thick as stars in heaven.
My wealth shall be so great that I can spend
Millions each day nor feel the want. I'll give
Till there shall be no poor in all my realms,
Nor any grieved; for I shall every night,

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Like Haroon-al-rasheed, the mighty Caliph,
Wander disguised with Jaafar and Masrour
Redressing wrongs, repressing Almuenes,
And set up noble men like my dear father
In lofty places, giving priceless boons,
An unseen Providence to all mankind.

Doonya

And you will marry me, dear Nureddene
To Jaafar, your great Vizier, so that we
Shall never part, but every blessed night
Drink and be merry in your halls, and live
Felicitously for ever and for aye,
So long as full moons shine and brains go wrong
And wine is drunk. I make my suit to you from now,
Caliph of Faeryland.

Nureddene

Your suit is granted.
And meanwhile, Doonya, I amuse myself
With nearer kingdoms, Miriam's wavy locks
And Shazarath-al-Durr's sweet voice of song.

Doonya

And meanwhile, brother, till you get your kingdom,
We shall be grim, quite grim.

Ameena

Your father's angry.
I have not known him yet so moved. My child,
Do not force us to punish you.

Nureddene

With kisses ?
Look, Doonya, at these two dear hypocrites,

She with her gentle honey-worded threats,
He with his stormings. Pooh ! I care not for you.

Ameena

Not care !

Nureddene

No, not a jot for him or you,
My little mother, or only just so much
As a small kiss is worth.

Ameena

I told you, Doonya,
He was the dearest boy in all the world,
The best, the kindest.

Doonya

Oh yes, you told me that.
And was the dearest boy in all the world
Rummaging the regions for the dearest girl,
While the admiring sun danced round the welkin
A triple circuit ?

Nureddene

I have found her, Doonya.

Doonya

The backward glance ?

Ameena

Your father !

Enter Ibn Sawy

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibn Sawy

Ameena,

I'm called to the palace; something is afoot.
Ah, rascal ! ah, you villain ! you have come ?

Nureddene

Sir, a long hour.

Ibn Sawy

Rogue ! scamp ! what do you mean ?
Knave, is my house a caravanseraï
For you to lodge in when it is your pleasure ?

Nureddene

It is the happiest home in Bassora,
Where the two kindest parents in the world
Excuse their vagabond son.

Ibn Sawy

Hum ! well ! What, fellow,
You will buy trinkets ? You will have me dunned ?
And fleeced ?

Nureddene

Did he dun you ? I hope he asked
A fitting price; I told him to.

Ibn Sawy

Sir, sir,
What game is this to buy your hussies trinkets
And send your father in the bill ? Who taught you
This rule of conduct ?

Nureddene

You, Sir.

Ibn Sawy

I, rascal ?

Nureddene

You told me

That debt must be avoided like a sin.
What other way could I avoid it, Sir,
Yet give the trinket ?

Ibn Sawy

Logic of impudence ?
Tell me, you curled wine-bibbing Aristotle,
Did I tell you also to have mistresses
And buy them trinkets ?

Nureddene

Not in so many words.

Ibn Sawy

So many devils !

Nureddene

But since you did not marry me
Nor buy a beautiful slave for home delight,
I thought you'd have me range outside for pleasures
To get experience of the busy world.
If 'twas an oversight, it may be mended.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibn Sawy

I'm dumb !

Nureddene

There is a Persian Muazzim sells,
Whom buy for me,—her rate's ten thousand pieces—

Ibn Sawy

A Persian ! Muazzim sells ! ten thousand pieces !

(to himself)

Where grows this tangle ? I become afraid.

Nureddene

Whom buy for me, I swear I'll be at home,
Quite four days out of seven.

Ibn Sawy

Hear me, young villain !

I'm called to the palace, but when I return,
Look to be bastinadoed, look to be curried
In boiling water. *(aside)* I must blind him well.
Ten days I shall be busy with affairs,
Then for your slavegirl. Bid the broker keep her.
Oh, I forgot ! I swore to pull your curls
For your offences.

Nureddene

I must not let you, Sir;
They are no longer my own property.
There's not a lock that has not been bespoken
For a memento.

Ibn Sawy

What ! What ! Impudent rascal !

(aside)

You handsome laughing rogue ! Hear, Ameena,

Let Doonya sleep with Anice every night.

No, come, hear farther.

Exit with Ameena

Nureddene

O Doonya, Doonya, tall, sweet, laughing Doonya !

I am in love,—drowned, strangled, dead with longing.

Doonya

For the world's Persian ? But she's sold by now.

Nureddene

I asked Muazzim.

Doonya

A quite absolute liar.

Nureddene

O if she is, I'll leave all other cares

And only seek her through an empty world.

Doonya

What, could one backward glance sweep you so forward ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Why, Doonya !

Doonya

Brother, I know a thing I know
You do not know. A sweet bird sang it to me
In an upper chamber.

Nureddene

Doonya, you're full of something,
And I must hear it.

Doonya

What will you give me for it ?
None of your nighthawk kisses, cousin mine !
But a mild loving kind fraternal pledge
I'll not refuse.

Nureddene

You are the wickedest, dearest girl
In all the world, the maddest sweetest sister
A sighing lover ever had. Now tell me.

Doonya

More, more ! I must be flattered.

Nureddene

No more. Come, mischief,
You'll keep me in suspense ?

(pulls her ears)

Doonya

Enough, enough !

The Persian—listen and perpend, O lover !
Lend ear while I unfold my wondrous tale,
A tale long, curled and with a tip,—Oh Lord !
I'll clip my tale. The Persian's bought for you
And in the upper chambers.

Nureddene

Doonya, Doonya !

But those two loving hypocrites,—

Doonya

All's meant

To be surprise.

Nureddene

Surprise me no surprises.

I am on fire, Doonya, I am on fire.

The upper chambers ?

Doonya

Stop, stop ! You do not know ;

There is an ogre at her door, a black
White-tusked huge-muscled hideous grinning giant,
Of mood uproarious, horrible of limb,
An Ethiopian fell ycleped Harkoos.

Nureddene

The eunuch !

Doonya

Stop, stop, stop. He has a sword,
A fearful, forceful, formidable blade.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Your eunuch and his sword ! I mount to heaven
And who shall stop me ?

Exit

Doonya

Stop, stop ! yet stop ! He's off
Like bolt from bowstring. Now the game's afoot
And Bassora's Soldan, Mahomed Alzayni,
May whistle for his slavegirl. I am Fate,
For I upset the plans of Viziers and of Kings.

Exit

SCENE 3

Ibn Sawy's house. The upper chambers of the women's apartments

Doonya, sleeping on a couch. Enter Nureddene and Anice

Nureddene

I told you 'twas the morning.

Anice-aljalice

Morning so early ?

This moment 'twas the evening star ; is that
The matin lustre ?

Nureddene

There is a star at watch beside the moon
Waiting to see you ere it leaves the skies.
Is it your sister Peri ?

Anice-aljalice

It is our star

And guards us both.

Nureddene

It is the star of Anice,
The star of Anice-aljalice who came
From Persia guided by its silver beams
Into these arms of vagrant Nureddene
Which keep her till the end. Sweet, I possess you !
Till now I could not potently believe it.
Strange, strange that I who nothing have deserved,

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Should win what all would covet ! We are fools
Who reach at baubles taking them for stars.
O wiser woman who come straight to Heaven !
But I have wandered by the way and staled
The freshness of delight with gadding pleasures,
Anticipated Love's perfect fruit with sour
And random berries void of real savour.
Oh fool ! had I but known ! What can I say
But once more that I have deserved you not,
Who yet must take you, knowing my undesert,
Whatever come hereafter.

Anice-aljalice

The house is stirring.

Nureddene

Who is this sleeping here ? My cousin Doonya !

Doonya

(waking)

Is morning come ? My blessing on you, children.
Be good and kind, dears ; love each other, darlings.

Nureddene

Dame Mischief, thanks ; thanks, Mother Madcap.

Doonya

Now, whither ?

Nureddene

To earth from Paradise.

Doonya

Wait, wait ! You must not
Walk off the stage before your part is done.
The situation now with open eyes
And lifted hands and chidings. You'll be whipped,
Anice, and Nureddene packed off to Mecca
On penitential legs : I shall be married.

(opening the door)

Oh, our fell Ethiopian snoozing here ?
Snore, noble ogre, snore louder than nature
To excuse your gloomy skin from worse than thwacks.
Wait for me, Nureddene.

Exit

Anice-aljalice

They will be angry.

Nureddene

Oh, with two smiles I'll buy an easy pardon.

Anice-aljalice

Whatever comes, we are each other's now.

Nureddene

Nothing will come to us but happy days,
You, my surpassing jewel, on my neck
Closer to me than my own heartbeats.

Anice-aljalice

Yes,
Closer than kisses, closer than delight,
Close only as love whom sorrow and delight
Cannot diminish, nor long absence change

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nor daily prodigality of joy
Expend immortal love.

Nureddene

You have the love.

Doonya returns

Doonya

I have told Nuzhath to call mother here.
There will be such a gentle storm.

Enter Ameena at the door

Ameena

Harkoos !

Sleeping !

Harkoos

Gmn—Mmn—

Doonya

Grunted almost like nature,
Thou excellent giant.

Ameena

Harkoos, dost thou sleep ?

Harkoos

Sleep ! I ! I was only pondering a text of Koran with closed eyes, lady. You give us slaves pitiful small time for our devotions; but 'twill all be accounted for hereafter.

Ameena

And canst thou meditate beneath the lash ?
For there thou'lt shortly be.

Harkoos

Stick or leather, 'tis all one to Harkoos. I will not be cudgelled out of my straight road to Paradise.

Ameena

My mind misgives me.

(enters the room)

Was this well done, my child ?

Nureddene

Dear, think the chiding given; do not pain
Your forehead with a frown.

Ameena

You, Doonya, too

Were part of this ?

Doonya

Part ! you shall not abate
My glory; I am its artificer,
The auxiliary and supplement of Fate.

Ameena

Quite shameless in your disobedience, Doonya ?
Your father's anger will embrace us all.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

And nothing worse than the embrace which ends
A chiding and a smile, our fault deserves.
You had a gift for me in your sweet hands
Concealed behind you; I have but reached round
And taken it ere you knew.

Ameena

For you, my son ?
She was not for you, she was for the King.
This was your worst fault, child; all others venial
Beside it.

Nureddene

For the King ! You told me, Doonya,
That she was bought for me, a kind surprise
Intended ?

Doonya

I did, exact !

Ameena

Such falsehood, Doonya !

Doonya

No falsehood, none. Purchased she was for him,
For he has got her. And surprise ! Well, mother,
Are you not quite surprised ? And uncle will be
Most woefully. My cousin and Anice too
Are both caught napping,—all except great Doonya.
No falsehood, mere excess of truth, a bold
Anticipation of the future, mother.

Nureddene

I did not know of this. Yet blame not Doonya;
For had I known, I would have run with haste
More breathless to demand my own from Fate.

Ameena

What will your father think ? I am afraid.
He was most urgent; grave beyond his wont.
Absent yourself awhile and let me bear
The first keen breathing of his anger.

Nureddene

The King !

And if he were the Caliph of the world,
He should not have my love. Come, fellow-culprit.

Exit with Doonya

Ameena

Harkoos, go fetch your master here; and stiffen
The muscles of your back. Negligent servant !

Harkoos

'Tis all one to Harkoos. Stick or leather ! leather or stick ! 'Tis the
way of this wicked and weary world.

Exit

Ameena

Yet, Anice, tell me, is't too late ? Alas !
Your cheeks and lowered eyes confess the fault.
I fear your nature and your nurture, child,

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Are not so beautiful as is your face.
Could you not have forbidden this ?

Anice-aljalice

Lady,
Remember my condition. Can a slave
Forbid or order ? We are only trained
To meek and quick obedience; and what's virtue
In freemen is in us a deep offence.
Do you command your passions, not on us
Impose that service; 'tis not in our part.

Ameena

You have a clever brain and a quick tongue.
And yet this speech was hardly like a slave's !
I will not blame you.

Anice-aljalice

I deny not, lady,
My heart consented to this fault.

Ameena

I know
Who 'twas besieged you, girl, and do not blame
Your heart for yielding where it had no choice.
Go in.

Exit Anice. Enter Harkoos and Ibn Sawy

Ibn Sawy

I hope, I hope that has not chanced
Which I have striven to prevent. This slave
Grins only and mutters gibberish to my questions.

Ameena

The worst.

Ibn Sawy

Why so ! the folly was my own
And I must bear its heavy consequence.
Sir, you shall have your wage for what has happened.

Harkoos

The way of the world. Whose peg's loose ? Beat Harkoos. Because my young master would climb through the wrong window and mistake a rope-ladder for the staircase, my back must ache. Was the window-sill my post ? Have I wings to stand upon air or a Djinn's eye to see through wood ? How bitter is injustice !

Ibn Sawy

You shall be thrashed for your poor gift of lying.

Ameena

Blame none ; it was unalterable fate.

Ibn Sawy

That name by which we put our sins on God,
Yet shall not so escape. 'Twas our indulgence
Moulded the boy and made him fit for sin ;
Which now, by our past mildness hampered quite,
We cannot punish without tyranny.
Offences we have winked at, when they knocked
At foreign doors, how shall we look at close
When they come striking home ?

Ameena

What will you do ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibn Sawy

The offence here merits death, but not the offender.
Easy solution if the sin could die
And leave the sinner living !

Ameena

Vizier, you are perplexed, to talk like this
Because a little's broken, break not more.
Let Nureddene have Anice-aljalice,
As Fate intended. Buy another slave
Fairer than she is for great Alzayni's bed,
Return his money to the treasury
And cover up this fault.

Ibn Sawy

With lies ?

Ameena

With silence.

Ibn Sawy

Will God be silent ? Will my enemies ?
The son of Khakan silent ? Ameena,
My children have conspired my shame and death.

Ameena

Face not the thing so mournfully. Vizier, you want
A woman's wit beside you in the Court.
Muene may speak ; will you be dumb ? Whom then
Will the King trust ? Collect your wits, be bold,
Be subtle ; guard yourself, protect your child.

Ibn Sawy

You urge me on a road my weaker heart
Chooses, not reason. But consider, dame,
If we excuse such gross and violent fault
Done in our house, what hope to save our boy,—
Oh, not his body, but the soul within ?
'Twill petrify in vice and grow encrusted
With evil as with a leprosy.

Ameena

Do this.
Show a fierce anger, have a gleaming knife
Close at his throat, let him be terrified.
Then I'll come in with tears and seem to save him
On pledge of fairer conduct.

Ibn Sawy

This has a promise.
Give me a knife and let me try to frame
My looks to anger.

Ameena

Harkoos, a dagger here !

Harkoos gives his dagger

Ibn Sawy

But see, you come not in too early anxious
And mar the game.

Ameena

Trust me.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibn Sawy

Go, call my son,
Harkoos ; let him not know that I am here.

Exit Harkoos

Go, Ameena.

Exit Ameena

Plays oft have serious fruit,
'Tis seen ; then why not this ? 'tis worth the trial.
Prosper or fail, I must do something quickly
Before I go upon the Caliph's work
To Roum the mighty. But I hear him come.

Enter Nureddene and Harkoos

Nureddene

You're sure of it ? You shall have gold for this
Kind treason.

Harkoos

Trust Harkoos ; and if he beats me,
Why, sticks are sticks and leather is but leather.

Nureddene

Father !

Ibn Sawy

O rascal, traitor, villain, imp !

*He throws him down on a couch and
holds him under his dagger*

I'll father you. Prepare, prepare your soul,
Your black and crime-encrusted soul for hell.
I'm death and not your father.

Nureddene

Mother, quick !

Help, mother !

Ameena comes hurrying in

The poor dear old man is mad.

Ibn Sawy

Ah, woman ! Wherefore do you come so soon ?

Nureddene

How his eyes roll ! Satan, abandon him.
Take him off quickly.

Ibn Sawy

Take me off, you villain ?

Nureddene

Tickle him in the ribs, that's the best way

Ibn Sawy

Tickle me in the ribs ! Impudent villain !
I'll cut your throat.

Ameena

(frightened)

Husband, what do you ? think,

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

He is your only son.

Ibn Sawy

And preferable
I had not him. Better no son than bad ones.

Nureddene

Is there no help then ?

Ibn Sawy

None; prepare !

Nureddene

But let me lie a little easier first. All right.

Ibn Sawy

Lie easier ! Rogue, your impudence amazes.
You shall lie easier soon on coals of hell.

Ameena

This goes no farther.

Amice-aljalice

(looking in)

They are in angry talk.
Oh, kill me rather !

Nureddene

Waste not your terrors, sweet heart.
We are rehearsing an old comedy,

“The tyrant father and his graceless son”.
Foolish old man !

Ibn Sawy

What ! What !

Nureddene

See now the end
Of all your headstrong moods and wicked rages
You would indulge yourself in, though I warned you,
Against your gallant handsome virtuous son.
And now they have turned your brain ! Vicious indulgence,
How bitter-dusty is thy fruit ! Be warned
And put a rein on anger, curb in wrath,
That enemy of man. Oh, thou art grown
A sad example to all angry fathers !

Ibn Sawy

Someone had told you of this. (*To Harkoos*) Grinning villain !

Harkoos

Oh yes, it is I, of course. Your peg's loose; beat Harkoos.

Ibn Sawy

My peg, you rogue ! I'll loose your peg for you.

Nureddene

No, father, let him be, and hear me out.
I swear it was not out of light contempt
For your high dignity and valued life
More precious to me than my blood, if I
Transgressed your will in this. I knew not of it,

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nor that you meant my Anice for the King.
For me I thought her purchased, so was told,
And still believe religiously that Fate
Brought her to Bassora only for me.

Ibn Sawy

It was a fault, my child.

Nureddene

Which I cannot repent.

Ibn Sawy

You are my son, generous and true and bold
Though faulty. Take the slave girl then, but swear
Never hereafter mistress, slave or wife
Lies in your arms but only she; neither,
Until herself desire it, mayst thou sell her.
Swear this and keep thy love.

Nureddene

I swear it.

Ibn Sawy

Leave us.

Exit Nureddene

Anice, in care for thee I have required
This oath from him, which he, perhaps will keep.
Do thou requite it; be to him no less
Than a dear wife.

Anice-aljalice

How noble is the nature
That prompts you to enforce on great offenders
Their dearest wishes !

Ibn Sawy

Go in, my child, go, Anice.

Exit Anice

Last night of my departure hence to Roum
To parley with the Greek for great Haroon,
I spoke with you, and my long year of absence,—

Ameena

It is a weary time.

Ibn Sawy

Wherein much evil
May chance; and therefore will I leave my children
As safe as God permits. Doonya to nuptials.
The son of Khakan wants her for his cub,
But shall not have her. One shall marry her
Who has the heart and hand to guard her well.

Ameena

Who, husband ?

Ibn Sawy

Murad, Captain of the City.
He rises daily in Alzayni's favour.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ameena

He is a Turk. Our noble Arab branch
Were ill engrafted on that savage stock.

Ibn Sawy

A prejudice. There is no stock in Islam
Except the Prophet. For our Nureddene,
I will divide my riches in two halves,
Leave one to him and one for you with Murad,
While you are with your kin or seem to be.

Ameena

Oh wherefore this ?

Ibn Sawy

'Tis likely that the boy,
Left here in sole command, will waste his wealth
And come to evil. If he's sober, well;
If not, when he is bare as any rock,
Abandoned by his friends, spewed out by all,
It may be that in this sharp school and beaten
With savage scourges the wild blood in him
May learn sobriety and noble use :
Then rescue him, assist his better nature.
And we shall see too how the loves endure
Betwixt him and the Persian; whether she
Deserves her monarchy in his wild will,
Or, even deserving, keeps it.

Ameena

But, dear husband,
Shall I not see my boy for a whole year ?

Ibn Sawy

No tears ! Consider it the punishment
Of our too fond indulgent love,—happy
If that be worst. All will end well, I hope,
And I returning, glad, to Bassora
Embrace a son reformed, a happy niece
Nursing her babe, and you, the gentle mother,
Like the sweet kindly earth whose patient love
Embraces even our faults and sins. Grant it
O Allah, if it be at all Thy will.

Exeunt

SCENE 4

A room in Ajebe's house

Ajebe

Balkis, do come, my heart.

Enter Balkis

Balkis

Your will ?

Ajebe

My will !

When had I any will since you came here,
You rigorous tyrant ?

Balkis

Was it for abuse

You called me ?

Ajebe

Bring your lute and sing to me.

Balkis

I am not in the mood.

Ajebe

Sing, I entreat you.
I am hungry for your voice of pure delight.

Balkis

I am no kabob, nor my voice a curry.
Hungry, forsooth !

Exit

Ajebe

Oh, Balkis, Balkis ! hear me.

Enter Mymoona

Mymoona

It's useless calling; she is in her moods.
And there's your Vizier getting down from horse
In the doorway.

Ajebe

I will go and bring him up.
Mymoona, coax her for me, will you, girl ?

Exit

Mymoona

It is as good to meet a mangy dog
As this same uncle of ours. He seldom comes.

She conceals herself behind a curtain

Re-enter Ajebe with Almuene

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Almuene

He goes tomorrow ? Well. And Nureddene
The scapegrace holds his wealth in hand ? Much better.
I always said he was a fool. (*To himself*) Easily
I might confound him with this flagrant lapse
About the slavegirl. But wait ! wait ! He gone,
His memory waned, his riches squandered quite,
I'll ruin his son, ruin the insolent Turk
He has preferred to my Fareed. His Doonya
And Anice slavegirls to my lusty boy,
His wife—but she escapes. It is enough
They come back to a desolate house. Oh ! let
Their forlorn wrinkles hug an empty nest
In life's cold leafless winter ! Meanwhile I set
My seal on every room in the King's heart;
He finds no chamber open when he comes.

Ajebe

Uncle, you ponder things of weight ?

Almuene

No, Ajebe;
Trifles, mere trifles. You're a friend, I think,
Of Ibn Sawy's son ?

Ajebe

We drink together.

Almuene

Right, right ! Would you have place, power, honours, gold,
Or is your narrow soul content with ease ?

Ajebe

Why, uncle !

Almuene

Do you dread death ? furious disgrace ?
Or beggary that's worse than either ? Do you ?

Ajebe

All men desire those blessings, fear these ills.

Almuene

They shall be yours in overflowing measure,
Good, if you serve me, ill, if you refuse.

Ajebe

What service ?

Almuene

Ruin wanton Nureddene.
Gorge him with riot and excess; rob him
Under a friendly guise; force him to spend
Till he's a beggar. Most, delude him on
To prone extremity of drunken shame
Which he shall feel, yet have no power to check.
Drench all his senses in vile profligacy,
Not mere light gallantries, but gutter filth,
Though you have to share it. Do this and you're made;
But this undone, you are yourself undone.
Eight months I give you. No, attend me not.

Exit

Ajebe

Mymoona ! girl, where are you ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Mymoona

Here, here, behind you.

Ajebe

A Satan out of hell has come to me.

Mymoona

A Satan, truly, and he'd make you one,
Damning you down into the deepest hell of all.

Ajebe

What shall I do ?

Mymoona

Not what he tells you to.

Ajebe

Yet if I do not, I am gone. No man
In Bassora could bear his heavy wrath
On the other side—

Mymoona

Leave the other side. 'Tis true,
The dog will keep his word in evil; for good,
'Tis brittle, brittle. But you cannot do it;
Our Balkis loves his Anice so completely.

Ajebe

Girl, girl, my life and goods are on the die.

Mymoona

Do one thing.

Ajebe

I will do what you shall bid me.

Mymoona

He has some vile companions, has he not ?

Ajebe

Cafoor and Ayoob and the rest; a gang
of pleasant roisterers without heart or mind.

Mymoona

Whisper the thing to them; yourself do nothing.
Check him at times. Whatever else you do,
Take not his gifts; they are the price of shame.
If he is ruined, as without their urging
Is likely, Satan's satisfied, if not,
We'll flee from Bassora when there's no help.

Ajebe

You have a brain. Yet if I must be vile,
A bolder vileness best becomes a man.

Mymoona

And Balkis ?

True.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Mymoona

Be safe, be safe. The rest
Is doubtful, but one truth is sadly sure,
That dead men cannot love.

Ajebe

I'll think of it.
Mymoona, leave me; send your sister here.

Exit Mymoona

The thing's too vile ! and yet—honours and place,
And to set Balkis on a kingdom's crest
Breaking and making men with her small hands
The lute's too large for ! But the way is foul.

Enter Balkis

Balkis

What's your command ?

Ajebe

Bring me your lute and sing.
I'm sad and troubled. Cross me not, my girl,
My temper's wry.

Balkis

Oh, threats ?

Ajebe

Remember still
You are a slave, however by my love
Pampered, and sometimes think upon the scourge.

Balkis

Do, do ! yes, beat me ! Or why beat me only ?
Kill me, as you have killed my heart already
With your harsh words. I knew, I knew what all
Your love would end in. Oh ! oh ! oh ! (*Weeps*)

Ajebe

Forgive me,
O sweetest heart. I swear I did not mean it.

Balkis

Because in play I sometimes speak a little—
O scourge me, kill me !

Ajebe

'Twas a jest, a jest !
Tear not my heart with sobs. Look, Balkis, love,
You shall have necklaces worth many thousands,
Pearls, rubies, if you only will not weep.

Balkis

I am a slave and only fit for scourging,
Not pearls and rubies. Mymoona ! Oh, Mymoona !
Bring him a scourge and me a cup of poison.

Exit

Ajebe

She plays upon me as upon her lute,
I'm as inert, as helpless, as completely
Ruled by her moods, as dumbly pleasureless
By her light hands untouched. How to appease her ?
Mymoona ! oh, Mymoona !

Exit

ACT III

SCENE I

Bassora

Ibn Sawy's house

A room in the outer apartments decorated for a banquet

Doonya, Anice-aljalice, Balkis

Doonya

Lord, how they pillage ! Even the furniture
Cannot escape these Djinns. Ogre Ghaneem
Picks up that costly chain between his teeth
And off to his castle; devil Ayoob drops
That table of mosaic in his pocket;
Zeb sweeps off rugs and couches in a whirlwind.
What purse will long put up with such ill-treatment ?

Balkis

It must be checked.

Doonya

'Tis much that he has kept
His promise to my uncle. Oh, he's sound !
These villains spoil him. Anice, you are to blame.
However you complain, yourself are quite
As reckless.

Anice-aljalice

I ?

Doonya

Yes, you. Is there a bright
Unnecessary jewel you have seen
And have not bought ? a dress that took your fancy
And was not in a moment yours ? Or have you lost
A tiny chance of laughter, song and wine,
Since you were with him ?

Anice-aljalice

A few rings and chains,
Some silks and cottons I have bought at times.

Doonya

What did these trifles cost ?

Anice-aljalice

I do not know.

Doonya

Of course you do not. Come, it's gone too far;
Restrain him, curb yourself.

Balkis

Next time he calls you
To sing among his wild companions, send
Cold answers, do not go.

Anice-aljalice

To break the jest,
The flow of good companionship, drive out

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Sweet friendly looks with anger, be a kill-joy
And frowner in this bright and merry world !
Oh, all the sins that human brows grow wrinkled
With frowning at, could never equal this !

Doonya

But if the skies grew darker ?

Anice-aljalice

If they should !

It was a bright and merry world. To see him
Happy and gay and kind was all I cared for,
There my horizon stopped. But if the skies
Did darken ! Doonya, it shall cease today.

Enter Azeem

Well, Azeem.

Azeem

Madam, half the creditors,
And that means half the shops in Bassora,
Hold session in the outer hall and swear
It shall be permanent till they get money.

Anice-aljalice

Where is your master ? Call him here. A moment !
Have you the bills ?

Azeem

All of them, long as pillars
And crammed from head to foot with monstrous sums.

Anice-aljalice

Call him.

Azeem

He's here.

Enter Nureddene

Nureddene

What, cousin Doonya ! Balkis !
Did you steal down to see the decorations ?
Are they not pretty ?

Doonya

Like a painted tombstone
Sculptured and arabesqued, but death's inside
And bones, my brother, bones.

Nureddene

And there are bones
In this fair pleasing outside called dear Doonya,
But let us only think of rosy cheeks,
Sweet eyes and laughing lips and not the bones.

Doonya

You have boned my metaphor and quite disboned it,
Until there's nothing firm inside; 'tis pulpy.

Anice-aljalice

The creditors besiege you, Nureddene;
You'll pay them.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Serious, Anice ?

Anice-aljalice

I will not smile again. Azeem, the bills !
Till you do,

Nureddene

Is this your doing, Doonya ?

Doonya

Yours, cousin, yours.

Nureddene

Is't so ? Anice ?

Anice-aljalice

I've told you.

Nureddene

Show me the bills.

Go in, you three.

Anice-aljalice

Ah, he is grieved and angry !
His eyes are clouded; let me speak to him.

Balkis

Now you'll spoil all; drag her off, Doonya.

Doonya

Come.

Exit drawing away Anice, Balkis behind

Nureddene

Well, Sir, where are these bills ?

Azeem

You will see the bills ?

Nureddene

The sums, the sums !

Azeem

To tailor Mardouc twenty-four thousand pieces, namely for caftans, robes, shawls, turbans, Damascus silks,—

Nureddene

Leave the inventory.

Azeem

To tailor Labkan another twenty-thousand ; to the baker two thousand ; to the confectioner as much ; to the Bagdad curio-merchant twenty-four thousand ; to the same from Ispahan, sixteen-thousand ; to the jeweller on account of necklaces, bracelets, waist-ornaments, anklets, rings, pendants and all manner of trinkets for the slavegirl Anice-aljalice, ninety thousand only ; to the upholsterer—

Nureddene

Hold, hold ! why, what are all these monstrous sums ?
Hast thou no word but thousands in thy belly,
Exorbitant fellow ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Azeem

Why, sir, 'tis in the bills ; my belly's empty enough.

Nureddene

Nothing but thousands !

Azeem

Here's one for seven hundred, twelve dirhams and some odd fractions from Husayn cook.

Nureddene

The sordid, dingy rogue ! Will he dun me so brutally for a base seven hundred ?

Azeem

The fruiterer—

Nureddene

Away ! bring bags.

Azeem

Bags, sir ?

Nureddene

Of money, fool. Call Harkoos and all the slaves. Bring half my treasury.

Exit Azeem

She frown on me ! look cold ! for sums, for debts !
For money, the poor paltry stuff we dig

By shovels from base mire. Grows love so beggarly
That it must think of piastres ? O my heart !

*Enter Azeem, Harkoos and slaves with
bags of money*

Heap them about the room—Go, Azeem, call
That hungry pack ; they shall be fed.

Exit Azeem

Harkoos,
Open two bags there. Have you broken the seals ?

Enter Azeem ushering in the creditors

Who asks for money ?

Cook

I, Sir, seven hundred denars, twelve dirhams and three fourth of a dirham,
that is my amount.

Nureddene

Take thy amount, thou dingy-hearted rogue.

Throws a bag towards him

You there, take yours.

Jeweller

Sir, this is not a hundredth part of your debt to me.

Nureddene

Give him two hundred bags.

Harkoos

Bags, sir ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Do you grin, rogue, and loiter ? Take that !

Strikes him

Harkoos

Exactly. Your peg's loose, beat Harkoos. Old master or young, 'tis all one to Harkoos. Stick or leather ! cuff or kick ! these are all the houses of my horoscope.

Nureddene

I am sorry I struck thee ; there's gold. Give them all the money ; all, I say. Porter that home, you rascals, and count your sums. What's over, cram your throats with it ; or, if you will, throw it in the gutter.

Creditors

(scrambling and quarrelling for the bags)

That's mine ! that's mine ! no, mine ! Leave go, you robber. Whom do you call robber, thief ?

Nureddene

Cudgel them from the room.

*Exeunt creditors snatching bags and
pursued by the slaves*

Azeem

'Tis madness, sir.

Nureddene motions him away. Exit Azeem

Nureddene

If she were clothed in rags
And beggary her price, I'd follow her

From here to China. She to frown on me
For money !

Enter Anice

Anice-aljalice

Nureddene, what have you done ?

Nureddene

You bade me pay the fellows : I have paid them.

Anice-aljalice

You are angry with me ? I did not think you could
Be angry with me for so slight a cause.

Nureddene

I did not think that you could frown on me
For money, for a matter of money !

Anice-aljalice

You
Believe that ? Is it so you know me ? Dear,
While for my sake you ruined yourself, must I
Look smiling on ? Nay, ruin then yourself
And try me.

Nureddene

Dear Anice, it was with myself
I was angry, but the coward in me turned
On you to avenge its pain. Let me forget
All else and only think of you and love.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Anice-aljalice

Shall I sing to you ?

Nureddene

Do, Anice.

Anice-aljalice

There's a song—

Song

Love keep terms with tears and sorrow ?
He's too bright.
Born today, he may tomorrow
Say good night.

Love is gone ere grief can find him;
But his way
Tears that falling lag behind him
Still betray.

I cannot sing.

Nureddene

Tears, Anice ? O my love,
What worst calamity do they portend
For him who caused them ?

Anice-aljalice

None, none, or only showers
The sunlight soon o'ertakes. Away with grief !
What is it after all but money lost ?
Beggars are happier, are they not, my lord ?

Nureddene

Much happier, Anice.

Anice-aljalice

Let us be beggars, then.
Oh, we shall wander blissfully about
In careless rags. And I shall take my lute
And buy you honey-crusts with my sweet voice.
For is not my voice sweet, my master ?

Nureddene

Sweet
As Gabriel's when he sings before the Lord
And Heaven listens.

Anice-aljalice

We shall reach Bagdad
Some day and meet the Caliph in the streets,
The mighty Caliph Haroun-al-Rasheed,
Disguised, a beggar too, give him our crusts
And find ourselves all suddenly the friends
Of the world's master. Shall we not, my lord ?

Nureddene

Anice, we shall.

Anice-aljalice

Let us be beggars then,
Rich, happy paupers singing through the world.
Oh, but you have a father and a mother !
Come, sit down there and I will stand before you
And tell a story.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Sit by me and tell it.

Anice-aljalice

No, no, I'll stand.

Nureddene

Well, wilful. Now, your tale.

Anice-aljalice

I have forgotten it. It was about
A man who had a gem earth could not buy.

Nureddene

As I have you.

Anice-aljalice

Be silent, sir. He kept it
With ordinary jewels which he took
Each day and threw into the street, and said,
"I'll show this earth that all the gems it has,
Together match not this I'll solely keep."

Nureddene

As I'll keep you.

Anice-aljalice

Ah, but he did not know
What slender thread bound to a common pearl
That wonder. When he threw that out, alas !

His jewel followed, and though he sought earth through,
He never could again get back his gem.

Nureddene

(after a pause)

Tomorrow I will stop this empty life,
Cut down expense and only live for you.
Tonight there is the banquet. It must stand,
My word being given. Azeem !

Enter Azeem

What money still
Is in the treasury ? What debts outstand ?

Azeem

More now than you can meet. But for today's folly, all would have been
well,—your lordly folly ! Oh, beat me ! I must speak.

Nureddene

Realize all the estate, the house only excepted; satisfy the creditors.
For what's left, entreat delay.

Azeem

They will not be entreated. They have smelt the carrion and are all
winging up, beak outstretched and talons ready.

Nureddene

Carrion indeed and vile ! Wherefore gave God
Reason to his best creatures, if they suffer
The rebel blood to o'ercrow that tranquil, wise

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

And perfect minister ? Do what thou canst.
I have good friends to help me in my need.

Exit

Azeem

Good friends ? good bloodsuckers, good thieves ! Much help his need
will have out of them !

Anice-aljalice

There's always Ajebe.

Azeem

Will you trust him ? He is the Vizier's nephew.

Exeunt

SCENE 2

The same

Anice-aljalice, Nureddene

Anice-aljalice

And they all left ?

Nureddene

Cafoor crept down and heard
The clamorous creditors ; and they all left.
Ghaneem's dear mother's sick ; for my sweet love
Only he came, leaving her sad bedside ;
Friend Ayoob's uncle leaves today for Mecca :
In Cafoor's house there is a burial toward ;
Zeb's father, Omar's brother, Hussan's wife
Are piteously struck down. There never was
So sudden an epidemic witnessed yet
In Bassora, and all with various ailments.

Anice-aljalice

This is their friendship !

Nureddene

We will not judge so harshly.
It may be that a generous kindly shame
Or half-remorseful delicacy had pricked them.
I've sent Harkoos to each of them in turn
For loans to help me. We shall see. Who's here ?

Enter Ajebe

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ajebe, you have come back, you only ? Yes,
You were my friend and checked me always. Man
Is not ignoble, but has angel soarings,
Howe'er the nether devil plucks him down.
Still we have souls nor is the mould quite broken
Of that original and faultless plan
Which Adam spoilt.

Ajebe

I am your ruin's author.
If you have still a sword, use it upon me.

Nureddene

What's this ?

Ajebe

Incited by the Vizier, promised
Greatness, I in my turn incited these
To hurry you to ruin. Will you slay me ?

Nureddene

(after a silence)

Return and tell the Vizier that work's done.
Be great with him.

Ajebe

Are you entirely ruined ?

Nureddene

Doubt not your work's well done ; you can assure
The uncle. Came you back for that ?

Ajebe

If all I have,—

Nureddene

No more ! return alive.

Ajebe

You punish home.

Exit

Nureddene

The eunuch lingers.

Enter Harkoos

Well, sir, your success ?

Harkoos

I went first to Ayoob. He has had losses, very suddenly, and is dolorous that he cannot help you.

Nureddene

Ghaneem?

Harkoos

Has broken his leg for the present and cannot see any one for a long fortnight.

Nureddene

Cafoor ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Harkoos

Has gone into the country—upstairs.

Nureddene

Zeb ?

Harkoos

Wept sobbingly. Every time I mentioned money, he drowned the subject in tears. I might have reached his purse at last but I cannot swim.

Nureddene

Omar ?

Harkoos

Will burn his books sooner than lend you money.

Nureddene

Did all fail me ?

Harkoos

Some had dry eyes and some wet, but none a purse.

Nureddene

Go.

Exit Harkoos

What next ? Shall I, like him of Athens, change
And hate my kind ? Then should I hate myself,
Who ne'er had known their faults, if my own sins
Pursued me not like most unnatural hounds

Into their screened and evil parts of nature.
God made them; what He made, is doubtless good.

Anice-aljalice

You still have me.

Nureddene

That's much.

Anice-aljalice

No, everything.

Nureddene

'Tis true, and I shall feel it soon.

Anice-aljalice

My jewels
And dresses will fill up quite half the void.

Nureddene

Shall I take back my gifts ?

Anice-aljalice

If they are mine,
I choose to sell them.

Nureddene

Do it, I forgot;
Let Cafoor have the vase I promised him.
Come, Anice. I will ask Murad for help.

Exeunt

SCENE 3

A room in Ajebe's house

Balkis, Mymoona

Balkis

Did he not ask after me ? I'm sick, Mymoona.

Mymoona

Sick ? I think both of you are dying of a galloping consumption. Such colour in the cheeks was never a good symptom.

Balkis

Tell him I am very, very ill, tell him I am dying. Pray be pathetic.

Mymoona

Put saffron on your cheeks and look nicely yellow; he will melt.

Balkis

I think my heart will break.

Mymoona

Let it do so quickly; it will mend the sooner.

Balkis

(in tears)

How can you be so harsh to me, Mymoona ?

Mymoona

You foolish child ! Why did you strain your power
To such a breaking tightness ? There's a rhythm
Will shatter hardest stone; each thing in nature
Has its own point where it has done with patience
And starts in pieces; below that point play on it,
Nor overpitch the music. Look, he is coming.

Balkis

I'll go.

Mymoona

(holding her)

You shall not.

Enter Ajebe

Ajebe

I thought you were alone,
Mymoona. I am not cheap to thrust myself
Where I'm not wanted.

Balkis

I would be gone, Mymoona.
In truth, I thought it was the barber's woman;
Therefore I stayed.

Ajebe

There are such hearts, Mymoona,
As think so little of adoring love,
They make it only a pedestal for pride,
A whipping-stock for their vain tyrannies.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Balkis

Mymoona, there are men so weak in love,
They cannot bear more than an ass's load;
So high in their conceit, the tenderest
Kindest rebuke turns all their sweetness sour.

Ajebe

Some have strange ways of tenderness, Mymoona.

Balkis

Mymoona, some think all control a tyranny.

Mymoona

O you two children ! Come, an end of this !
Give me your hand.

Ajebe

My hand ? Wherefore my hand ?

Mymoona

Give it. I join two hands that much desire
And would have met ere this but for their owners,
Who have less sense than they.

Balkis

She's stronger than me,
Or I'd not touch you.

Ajebe

I would not hurt Mymoona;
Therefore I take your hand.

Mymoona

Oh, is it so ?
Then by your foolish necks ! Make your arms meet
About her waist.

Ajebe

Only to satisfy you,
Whom only I care for.

Mymoona

Yours here on his neck.

Balkis

I was about to yawn, therefore, I raised them.

Mymoona

I go to fetch a cane. Look that I find you
Much better friends. If you will not agree,
Your bones at least shall sympathise and ruefully.

Exit

Ajebe

How could you be so harsh to my great love ?

Balkis

How could you be so cruel and so wicked ?

Ajebe

I kiss you, but 'tis only your red lips
So soft, not you who are more hard than stone.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Balkis

I kiss you back, but only 'tis because
I hate to be in debt.

Ajebe

Will you be kinder ?

Balkis

Will you be more obedient and renounce
Your hateful uncle ?

Ajebe

Him and all his works,
If you will only smile on me.

Balkis

I'll laugh
Like any horse. No, I surrender. Clasp me,
I am your slave.

Ajebe

My queen of love.

Balkis

Both, both.

Ajebe

Why were you so long froward ?

Balkis

Do you remember
I had to woo you in the market ? how you
Hesitated a moment ?

Ajebe

Vindictive shrew !

Balkis

This time had I not reason to be angry ?

Ajebe

Oh, too much reason ! I feel so vile until
I find a means to wash this uncle stain from me.

Enter Mymoona

Mymoona

That's well. But we must now to Nureddene's.
For hard pressed as he is, he'll sell his Anice.

Balkis

Never !

Mymoona

He must.

Ajebe

I'll lend him thrice her value.

Mymoona

Do not propose it. The wound you gave's too recent.

Balkis

Then let me keep her as a dear deposit,
The sweet security of Ajebe's loan,
Till he redeems her.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Mymoona

He will take no favours.
No, let him sell her in the open market;
Ajebe will overtop all bids. Till he
Get means, she's safe with us and waiting for him.

Balkis

Oh, let us go at once.

Mymoona

I'll order letters.

Exit

Ajebe

Will you be like this always ?

Balkis

If you are good,
I will be. If not, I will outshrew Xantippe.

Ajebe

With such a heaven and hell in view, I'll be
An angel.

Balkis

Of what colour ?

Ajebe

Black! beside you,
But fair as seraphs to what I have been.

Exeunt

SCENE 4

Ibn Sawy's house

Anice, alone

Anice-aljalice

If Murad fails him, what is left ? He has
No other thing to sell but only me.
A thought of horror ! Is my love then strong
Only for joy, only to share his heaven ?
Can it not enter Hell for his dear sake ?
How shall I follow him then after death,
If Heaven reject him ? For the path's so narrow
Footing that judgment blade, to slip's so easy.
Avert the need, O Heaven.

Enter Nureddene

Has Murad failed him ?

Nureddene

Murad refuses. This load of debt's a torture !

Anice-aljalice

The dresses and the gems you made me keep—

Nureddene

Keep them; they are your own.

Anice-aljalice

I am your slavegirl.

My body and what it wears, all I am, all I have,
Are only for your use.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Girl, would you have me strip you then quite bare ?

Anice-aljalice

What does it matter ? The coarsest rag ten dirhams
Might buy, would be enough, if you'd still love me.

Nureddene

These would not meet one half of what I owe.

Anice-aljalice

Master, you bought me for ten thousand pieces.

Nureddene

Be silent.

Anice-aljalice

Has my value lessened since?

Nureddene

No more ! You'll make me hate you.

Anice-aljalice

If you do,

'Tis better, it will help my heart to break.

Nureddene

Have you the heart to speak of this ?

Anice-aljalice

Had I
Less heart, less love, I would not speak of it.

Nureddene

I swore to my father that I would not sell you.

Anice-aljalice

But there was a condition.

Nureddene

If you desired it !

Anice-aljalice

Do I not ask you ?

Nureddene

Speak truth ! Do you desire it ?
Truth, in the name of God who sees your heart !
Oh, you are silent.

Anice-aljalice

(weeping)

How could I desire it ?
Ajebe is here. Be friends with him, dear love;
Forgive his fault.

Nureddene

Anice, my own sins are
So heavy, not to forgive his lesser vileness
Would leave me without hope of heavenly pardon.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Anice-aljalice

I'll call him then.

Exit

Nureddene

Let me absolve these debts,
Then straight with Anice to Bagdad the splendid,
There is the home for hearts and brains and hands
Not in this petty centre. Core of Islam,
Bagdad, the flood to which all brooks converge.

Anice returns with Ajebe, Balkis, Mymoona

Ajebe

Am I forgiven ?

Nureddene

Ajebe, let the past
Have never been.

Ajebe

You are Ibn Sawy's son.

Nureddene

Give me your counsel, Ajebe. I have nothing
But the mere house which is not saleable.
My father must not find a homeless Bassora,
Returning.

Mymoona

Nothing else ?

Anice-aljalice

Only myself
Whom he'll not sell.

Mymoona

He must.

Nureddene

Never, Mymoona.

Mymoona

Fear not the sale which shall be in name alone.
'Tis only Balkis borrowing her from you,
Who pawns her value. She will stay with me
Serving our Balkis, safe from every storm,
But if you ask, why then the mart and auction ?
We must have public evidence of sale
To meet an uncle's questions.

Anice-aljalice

O now there's light.
Blessed Mymoona !

Nureddene

It must not be. My oath !

Anice-aljalice

But I desire it now, yes, I desire it.

Nureddene

And is my pride then nothing ? Shall I sell her
To be a slavegirl's slavegirl ? Pardon, Balkis.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Mymoona

Too fine, too fine !

Anice-aljalice

To serve awhile my sister !
For that she is in heart.

Balkis

Serve only in name.

Mymoona

She will be safe while you rebuild your fortunes.

Nureddene

I do not like it.

Mymoona

Nor does any one
As in itself, but only as a refuge
From greater evils.

Nureddene

Oh, you're wrong, Mymoona,
To quibble with an oath ! it will not prosper.
Straight dealing's best.

Mymoona

You look at it too finely.

Nureddene

Have it your way, then.

Mymoona

Call the broker here.

A quiet sale ! The uncle must not hear of it.

Ajebe

'Twould be the plague.

Nureddene

I fear it will not prosper.

Exeunt

SCENE 5

The slave-market

*Muazzim with Anice-aljalice exposed for sale
Ajebe, Aziz, Abdullah and Merchants*

Muazzim

Who bids ?

Aziz

Four thousand.

Muazzim

She went for ten when she was here first. Will you not raise your bid nearer her value ?

Aziz

She was new then and untouched. 'Tis the way with goods, broker ; they lose value by time and purchase, use and soiling.

Muazzim

Oh, sir, the kissed mouth has always honey. But this is a Peri and immortal lips have an immortal sweetness.

Ajebe

Five hundred to that bid.

Enter Almuene with slaves

Almuene

Ah, it is true ! All things come round at last
With the full wheel of Fate ; it is my hour.
Fareed shall have her. She shall be well handled
To plague her lover's heart before he dies.

(*aloud*)

Broker, who sells the girl and what's her rate ?

Ajebe

All's lost.

Muazzim

Nureddene bin Alfazzal bin Sawy sells her and your nephew has bid
for her four thousand and five hundred.

Almuene

My nephew bids for me. Who bids against ?

Ajebe

Uncle—

Almuene

Go, find out other slavegirls, Ajebe,
Do well until the end. (*Exit Ajebe*) Who bids against me ?
She's mine then. Come.

Anice-aljalice

I'll not be sold to you.

Almuene

What, dar'st thou speak, young harlot ? Fear the whip.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Anice-aljalice

Vizier, I fear you not ; there's law in Islam.
My master will deny the sale.

Almuene

Thy master
Shall be a kitchen negro, who shall use thee.

Anice-aljalice

Had I a whip, you should not say it twice.

Muazzim

Vizier, Vizier, by law the owner's acceptance only is final for the sale.

Almuene

It is a form, but get it. I am impatient
Until I have this strumpet in my grip.

Muazzim

Well, here he comes.

Enter Nureddene and Ajebe

A merchant

Shall we go, shall we go ?

Abdullah

Stand by ! 'Tis noble Ibn Sawy's son.
We must protect him even at our own peril.

Muazzim

She goes for a trifle, sir, and even that little you will not get. You will weary your feet with journeyings, only to be put off by his villains, and when you grow clamorous they will demand your order and tear it before your eyes. That's your payment.

Nureddene

That's nothing. The wolf's cub, hunchback Fareed !
The sale is off.

Muazzim

Be advised by me. Catch the girl by the hair and cuff her soundly, abusing her with the harshest terms your heart can consent to, then off with her quickly as if you had brought her to market only to execute an oath made in anger. So he loses his hold on her.

Nureddene

I'll tell the lie. One fine, pure seeming falsehood,
Admitted, opens door to all his naked
And leprous family ; in, in, they throng
And breed the house quite full.

Muazzim

The Vizier wants her.
He bids four thousand pieces and five hundred.

Nureddene

'Tis nothing. Girl, I keep my oath. Suffice it
You're bidden for and priced in open market here.
Come home ! Be now less dainty, meeker of tongue,
Or you shall have more feeling punishments.
Do I need to sell thee ? Home ! My oath is kept.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Almuene

This is a trick to cheat the law. Thou ruffian !
Cheap profligate ! What hast thou left to sell
But thy own sensual filth and drunken body,—
If any out of charity would spend
Some dirhams to reform thee with a scourge.
Vile son of a bland hypocrite !

He draws his scimitar

Abdullah

Pause, Vizier.

Aziz

Be patient, Nureddene.

Almuene

I yet shall kill him.
Hence, harlot, foot before me to my kitchen.

Anice-aljalice

He has abused me filthily, my lord,
Before these merchants.

Almuene

Abuse thee, rag ? Hast thou
An use ? To be abused is thy utility.
Thou shalt be used and common.

Nureddene

Stand by, you merchants; let none interfere
On peril of his life. Thou foul-mouthed tyrant,
Into the mire and dirt, where thou wert gendered !

Almuene

Help, help ! Hew him in pieces.

The slaves are rushing forward

Abdullah

What do you, fellows ?

This is a Vizier and a Vizier's son.

Shall common men step in ? You'll get the blows

For only thanks.

Almuene

Oh ! Oh ! Will you then kill me ?

Nureddene

If thou wouldst live, crave pardon of the star
Thou hast spat on. I would make thee lick her feet
But that thy lips would foul their purity.

Almuene

Pardon, oh, pardon !

Nureddene

(throwing him away)

Live then, in thy gutter.

Exit with Anice

Abdullah

Go, slaves, lift up your master, lead him off.

Exeunt slaves with Almuene

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

He is well punished.

Aziz

What will come of this ?

Abdullah

No good to Nureddene. Let's go and warn him;
He's bold and proud, may think to face it out,
Which were mere waiting death.

Aziz

I pray on us

This falls not.

Exeunt Merchants

Nureddene

Here was ill-luck !

Ajebe

Nor ends with this.
I'll have a ship wide-sailed and well-provisioned
For their escape. Bassora will not hold them.

Exeunt

SCENE 6

The Palace at Bassora

Alzayni, Salar

Alzayni

So it is written here. Hot interchange
And high defiance have already passed
Between our Caliph and the daring Roman.
Europe and Asia are at grips once more.
To inspect the southward armies unawares
Haroun himself is coming.

Salar

Alfazzal then
Returns to us, unless the European,
After their barbarous fashion, seize on him.

Alzayni

'Tis strange, he sends no tidings of the motion
I made to Egypt.

Salar

'Tis too dangerous
To write of, as indeed 'twas ill-advised
To make the approach.

Alzayni

Great dangers justify
The smaller. Caliph Alrasheed conceives
On trifling counts a dumb displeasure towards me

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Which any day may speak; 'tis whispered of
In Bagdad. Alkhasib, the Egyptian Vizier,
Is in like plight. It is mere policy,
Salar, to build out of a common peril
A common safety.

Salar

Haroun al Rasheed
Could break each one of you between two fingers,
Stretching his left arm out to Bassora,
His right to Egypt. Sultan, wilt thou strive
Against the single giant of the world ?

Alzayni

Giants are mortal, friend, be but our swords
As bold as sharp. Call Murad here to me.

Exit Salar

My state is desperate, if Haroun lives;
He's sudden and deadly, when his anger bursts.
But let me be more sudden, yet more deadly.

Enter Murad

Murad, the time draws near. The Caliph comes
To Bassora; let him not thence return.

Murad

My blade is sharp and what I do is sudden.

Alzayni

My gallant Turk ! Thou shalt rise high, believe it.
For I need men like thee.

Murad

(to himself)

But Kings like thee

Earth needs not.

(Voice without)

Justice ! Justice ! Justice, King !
King of the Age, I am a man much wronged.

Alzayni

Who cries beneath my window ? Chamberlain !

Enter Sunjar

Sunjar

An Arab daubed with mud and dirt, all battered,
Unrecognizable, with broken lips cries out
For justice.

Alzayni

Bring him here.

Exit Sunjar

It is some brawl.

Enter Sunjar with Almuene

Thou, Vizier ! Who has done this thing to thee ?

Almuene

Mohamad, son of Sulyman ! Sultan
Alzayni ! Abbasside ! how shalt thou long

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Have friends, if the King's enemies may slay
In daylight, here, in open Bassora
The King's best friends because they love the King ?

Alzayni

Name them at once and choose their punishment.

Almuene

Alfazzal's son, that brutal profligate,
Has done this.

Murad

Nureddene !

Alzayni

Upon what quarrel ?

Almuene

A year ago Alfazzal bought a slavegirl
With the King's money for the King, a gem
Of beauty, learning, mind, fit for a Caliph.
But seeing the open flower he thought perhaps
Your royal nose too base to smell at it,
So gave her to his royaller darling son
To soil and rumple. No man with a neck
Dared tell you of it, such your faith was in him.

Alzayni

Is't so ? our loved and trusted Ibn Sawy !

Almuene

This profligate squandering away his wealth
Brought her to market; there I saw her and bid

Her fair full price. Whereat he stormed at me
With words unholy; yet I answered mild,
“My son, not for myself, but the King’s service
I need her.” He with bold and furious looks,
“Dog, Vizier of a dog, I void on thee
And on thy Sultan.” With which blasphemy
He seized me, rolled in the mire, battered with blows,
Kicks, pullings of the beard, then dragged me back
And flung me at his slavegirl’s feet, who, proud
Of her bold lover, footed my grey head
Repeatedly and laughed, “This for thy King,
Thy dingy stingy king who with so little
Would buy a slavegirl sole in all the world”.

Sunjar

Great Hasheem’s vein cords all the Sultan’s forehead.

Murad

The dog has murdered both of them with his.

Alzayni

Now by the Prophet, my forefather ! Out,
Murad ! drag here the fellow and his girl,
Trail them with ropes tied to their bleeding heels,
Their faces in the mire, with pinioned hands
Behind their backs, into my presence here.
Sack Sawy’s mansion, raze it to the ground.
What, am I grown so bare that by-lane dogs
Like these so loudly bay at me ? They die !

Murad

Sultan, —

Alzayni

He’s doomed who speaks a word for them.

Exit

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Almuene

Brother-in-law Murad, fetch your handsome brother.
Soon, lest the Sultan hear of it !

Murad

Vizier,
I know my duty. Know your own and do it.

Almuene

I'll wash, then forth in holiday attire
To see that pretty sport.

Exit

Sunjar

What will you do ?

Murad

Sunjar, a something swift and desperate.
I will not let them die.

Sunjar

Run not on danger.
I'll send a runner hotfoot to their house
To warn them.

Exit Sunjar

Murad

Do so. What will Doonya say
When she hears this ? How will her laughing eyes
Be clouded and brim over ! Till Haroun comes !

Exit

SCENE 7

Ibn Sawy's house

Nureddene, Anice

Nureddene

'Tis Sunjar warns us, he who always loved
Our father.

Anice

Oh, my lord, make haste and flee.

Nureddene

Whither and how ? But come.

Enter Ajebe

Ajebe

Quick, Nureddene.

I have a ship all ready for Badgad,
Sails bellying with fair wind, the pilot's hand
Upon the wheel, the captain on the deck,
You only wanting. Flee then to Bagdad
And at the mighty Haroun's hand require
Justice upon these tyrants. Oh, delay not.

Nureddene

O friend ! But do me one more service, Ajebe.
Pay the few creditors unsatisfied;
My father will absolve me when he comes.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ajebe

That's early done. And take my purse. No fumbling,
I will not be denied.

Nureddene

Bagdad ! (*laughing*) Why, Anice,
Our dream comes true; we hobnob with the Caliph !

Exeunt

ACT IV

Bagdad

SCENE I

The gardens of the Caliph's Palace outside the Pavilion of Pleasure

Anice, Nureddene

Anice-aljalice

This is Bagdad !

Nureddene

Bagdad the beautiful,
The city of delight. How green these gardens !
What a sweet clamour pipes among the trees.

Anice-aljalice

And flowers ! the flowers ! Look at these violets
Dark blue like burning sulphur ! Oh, rose and myrtle
And gilliflower and lavender; anemones
As red as blood ! All spring walks here in blossoms
And strews the pictured ground.

Nureddene

Do you see the fruit,
Anice ? Camphor and almond-apricots,
Green, white and purple figs and these huge grapes,
Round rubies or quite purple-black, that ramp
O'er wall and terrace; plums almost as smooth
As your own damask cheek. These balls of gold

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Are lemons, Anice, do you think ? Look, cherries,
And mid these fair pink-budded orange-blossoms
Rare glints of fruit.

Anice-aljalice

That was a blackbird whistled.
How the doves moan ! It's full of cooing turtles.
Oh see, the tawny bulbuls calling sweetly
And winging ! What a flutter of scarlet tails !
If it were dark, a thousand nightingales
Would surely sing together. How glad I am
That we were driven out of Bassora !

Nureddene

And this pavilion with its crowd of windows ?
Are there not quite a hundred ?

Anice-aljalice

Do you see
The candelabrum pendent from the ceiling ?
A blaze of gold !

Nureddene

Each window has a lamp.
Night in these gardens must be bright as day.
To find the master now ! Here we could rest
And ask our way to the great Caliph, Anice.

Enter Shaikh Ibrahim from behind

Ibrahim

So, so ! So, so ! Cavalier Servente with your bona roba ! You do not
know then of the Caliph's order forbidding entry into his gardens ?

No ? I will proclaim it then with a palmstick about your pretty back quarters. Will I not ? Hoh !

He advances stealthily with stick raised. Nureddene and Anice turn towards him, he drops the stick and remains with arm lifted.

Nureddene

Here is a Shaikh of the gardens. Whose garden is this, friend ?

Anice-aljalice

Is the poor man out of the use of his wits ? He stares open-mouthed.

Ibrahim

Glory to Allah who made you ! Glory to the angel who brought you down on earth ! Glory to myself who am permitted to look upon you ! I give glory to Allah for your beauty, O people of Paradise !

Nureddene

(smiling)

Rather give glory to Him because he has given thee a fine old age and this long silvery beard. But are we permitted in this garden ? The gate was not belted.

Ibrahim

This garden ? My garden ? Yes, my son ; yes, my daughter. It is the fairer for your feet ; never before did such flowers bloom there.

Nureddene

What, is it thine ? And this pavilion ?

Ibrahim

All mine, my son. By the grace of Allah to a poor sinful old man. 'Tis by his election, my son, and divine ordination and sanctification, and a

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

little by the power of my prostrations and lustrations which I neglect not, neither morning nor noon nor evening nor at any of the intervals by the law commanded.

Nureddene

When did you buy or lay it out, old father ?

Ibrahim

A grand-aunt left it to me. Wonder not, for she was indeed aunt's grandmother to a cousin of the sister-in-law of the Caliph.

Nureddene

Oh then indeed ! She had the right divine to be wealthy. But I trust thou hast good doctrinal justification for inheriting after her ?

Ibrahim

I would not accept the Caliphate by any other. Oh my son, hanker not unlawfully after perishable earthly goods ; for, verily, they are a snare and verily, verily, they entrap the feet of the soul as it toileth over the straight rough road to Heaven.

Anice-aljalice

But, old father, are you rich and go so poorly robed ? Were I mistress of such a garden, I would float about it in damask and crimson and velvet ; silk and satin should be my meanest apparel.

Ibrahim

(aside)

She has a voice like a blackbird's ! O angel Gabriel, increase this unto me. I will not quarrel with thee though all Houridom break loose on my garden ; for their gates thou hast a little opened. (*aloud*) Fie, my daughter ! I take refuge with Allah. I am a poor sinful old man on the brink of the grave, what should I do with robes and coloured raiment. But they would hang well on thee. Praise the Lord who has given thee

hips like the moon and a waist indeed ! a small, seizable waist, Allah forgive me !

Anice-aljalice

We are weary, old father ; we hunger and thirst.

Ibrahim

Oh, my son ! Oh, my daughter ! You put me to shame. Come in, come in ; this my pavilion is yours and there is within it plenty of food and drink,—such innocent things now as sherbet and pure kind water. But as for wine, that accursèd thing, it is forbidden by the Prophet, whose name is a benediction. Come in, come in. Allah curse him that giveth not to the guest and the stranger.

Nureddene

It is indeed thine ? we may enter ?

Ibrahim

Allah, Allah ! its floor yearns for thy beauty and for the fair feet of thy sister. If there were youth now instead of poor venerable me, would one not kiss the marble wherever her fair small feet will touch it ? But I praise Allah that I am an old man with my thoughts turned to chastity and holiness.

Nureddene

Come, Anice.

Ibrahim

(walking behind them)

Allah ! Allah ! She is a gazelle that springeth. Allah ! Allah ! the swan in my lake waddleth less perfectly. She is as a willow when the wind swayeth it. Allah ! Allah !

Exeunt to the pavilion

SCENE 2

The Pavilion of Pleasure

Anice-aljalice, Nureddene, Sheikh Ibrahim on couches, by a table set with dishes

Nureddene

These kabobs are indeed good, and the conserves look sweet and the fruit very glossy. But will you sit and eat nothing ?

Ibrahim

Verily, my son, I have eaten at midday. Allah forbid me from gluttony !

Anice-aljalice

Old father, you discourage our stomachs. You shall eat a morsel from my fingers or I will say you use me hardly.

Ibrahim

No, no, no, no. Ah well, from your fingers, from your small slim rosy fingers. Allah ! Only a bit, only a morsel : verily, verily ! Allah ! surely thy fingers are sweeter than honey. I could eat them with kisses.

Anice-aljalice

What, old father, you grow young ?

Ibrahim

Oh, now, now, now ! 'Twas a foolish jest unworthy of my grey hairs. I take refuge with Allah ! A foolish jest.

Nureddene

But, my aged host, it is dry eating without wine. Have you never a flagon in all this palace ? It is a blot, a blot on its fair perfection.

Ibrahim

I take refuge with Allah. Wine ! for sixteen years I have not touched the evil thing. When I was young indeed ! Ah well, when I was young. But 'tis forbidden. What saith Ibn Batata ? That wine worketh transmutation. And Ibrahim Alhashhash bin Fuzfuz bin Bierbiloon al Sandilani of Bassora, he rateth wine sorely and averreth that the red glint of it is the shine of the red fires of Hell, its sweetness kisseth damnation and the coolness of it in the throat causeth bifurcation. Ay, verily, the great Alhashhash.

Anice-aljalice

Who are these learned doctors you speak of, old father ? I have read all the books, but never heard of them.

Ibrahim

Oh, thou hast read ? These are very distant and mystic Sufis, very rare doctors. Their books are known only to the adepts.

Anice-aljalice

What a learned old man art thou, Shaikh Ibrahim ! Now Allah save the soul of the great Alhashhash !

Ibrahim

Hm ! 'Tis so. Wine ! Verily, the Prophet hath cursed grower and presser, buyer and seller, carrier and drinker. I take refuge with Allah from the curse of the Prophet.

Nureddene

Hast thou not even one old ass among all thy belongings ? And if an old ass is cursed, is it thou who art cursed ?

Ibrahim

Hm ! My son, what is thy parable ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

I will show you a trick to cheat the devil. Give three denars of mine to a neighbour's servant with a dirham or two for his trouble, let him buy the wine and clap it on an old ass, and let the old ass bring it here. So art thou neither grower nor presser, seller nor buyer, carrier or drinker, and if any be damned, it is an old ass that is damned. What saith the great Alhashnash.

Ibrahim

Hm ! Well, I will do it. (*aside*) Now I need not let them know that there is wine galore in my cupboards, Allah forgive me !

Exit

Nureddene

He is the very gem of hypocrites.

Anice-aljalice

The fitter to laugh at. Dear my lord, be merry
Tonight, if only for tonight. Let care
Expect tomorrow.

Nureddene

You are happy, Anice ?

Anice-aljalice

I feel as if I could do nothing else
But laugh through life's remainder. You're safe, safe
And that grim devil baffled. Oh, you're safe !

Nureddene

It was a breathless voyage up the river :
I think a price is on my head. Perhaps
Our helpers suffer.

Anice-aljalice

But you are safe, my joy,
My darling.

She goes to him and kisses and clings about him

Nureddene

Anice, your eyes are full of tears !
You are quite overwrought.

Anice-aljalice

Let only you be safe
And all the world beside entirely perish.
My love ! my master !

*She again embraces and kisses him repeatedly. Shaikh Ibrahim
returns with the wine and glasses in a tray*

Ibrahim

Allah ! Allah ! Allah !

Anice-aljalice

Where's that old sober learning ?
I want to dance, to laugh, to outriot riot.
Oh, here he is.

Nureddene

What a quick ass was this, Shaikh Ibrahim !

Ibrahim

No, no, the wineshop is near, very near. Allah forgive us, ours is an
evil city, this Bagdad ; it is full of wine-bibbers and gluttons and liars.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Dost thou ever lie, Shaikh Ibrahim ?

Ibrahim

Allah forbid ! Above all sins I abhor lying and liars. O my son, keep thy young lips from vain babbling and unnecessary lying. It is of the unpardonable sins, it is the way to Jahannam. But I pray thee what is the young lady to thee, my son ?

Nureddene

She is my slavegirl.

Ibrahim

Ah, ah ! thy slavegirl ? Ah, ah ! a slavegirl ! ah !

Anice-aljalice

Drink, my lord.

Nureddene

(drinking)

By the Lord, but I am sleepy. I will even rest my head in thy sweet lap for a moment.

He lies down

Ibrahim

Allah ! Allah ! What, he sleeps ?

Anice-aljalice

Fast. That is the trick he always serves me. After the first cup he dozes off and leaves me quite sad and lonely.

Ibrahim

Why, why, why, little one ! Thou art not alone and why shouldst thou be sad ? I am here,—old Shaikh Ibrahim ; I am here.

Anice-aljalice

I will not be sad, if you will drink with me.

Ibrahim

Fie, fie, fie !

Anice-aljalice

By my head and eyes ?

Ibrahim

Well, well, well ! Alas, 'tis a sin, 'tis a sin, 'tis a sin (*drinks*). Verily, verily.

Anice-aljalice

Another.

Ibrahim

No, no, no.

Anice-aljalice

By my head and eyes !

Ibrahim

Well, well, well, well ! 'Tis a grievous sin, Allah forgive me ! (*drinks*)

Anice-aljalice

Just one more.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibrahim

Does he sleep ? Now if it were the wine of thy lips, little one.

Anice-aljalice

Old father, old father ! Is this thy sanctity and the chastity of thee and thy averseness to frivolity ? To flirt with light-minded young hussies like me ! Where is thy sanctification ? Where is thy justification ? Where is thy predestination ? O mystic, thou art bifurked with an evil bifurcation. Woe's me for the great Alhashhash !

Ibrahim

No, no, no.

Anice-aljalice

Art thou such a hypocrite ? Shaikh Ibrahim ! Shaikh Ibrahim !

Ibrahim

No, no, no ! A fatherly jest ! a little little jest ! (*drinks*)

Nureddene

(*starting up*)

Shaikh Ibrahim, thou drinkest ?

Ibrahim

Oh, ah ! 'Twas thy slavegirl forced me. Verily, verily !

Nureddene

Anice ! Anice ! Why wilt thou pester him ? Wilt thou pluck down his old soul from heaven ? Fie ! draw the wine this side of the table. I pledge you, my heart.

Anice-aljalice

To you, my dear one.

Nureddene

You have drunk half your cup only; so, again; to Shaikh Ibrahim and his learned sobriety !

Anicec-aljalice

To the shade of the great Alhashhash !

Ibrahim

Fie on you ! What cursed unneighbourly manners are these, to drink in my face and never pass the bowl ?

Anice-aljalice and Nureddene

(together)

Shaikh Ibrahim ! Shaikh Ibrahim ! Shaikh Ibrahim !

Ibrahim

Never cry out at me. You are a Hour and she is a Houri come down from Heaven to ensnare my soul. Let it be ensnared ! 'Tis not worth one beam from under your eyelids. Hour, I will embrace thee, I will kiss thee, Houri.

Nureddene

Embrace not, Shaikh Ibrahim, neither kiss, for thy mouth smelleth evilly of that accursed thing, wine. I am woeful for the mystic Alhashhash.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Anice-aljalice

Are thou transmogrified, O Sufi, O adept, O disciple of Ibn Batata ?

Ibrahim

Laugh, laugh ! laughter is on your beauty like the sunlight on the fair minarets of Mazinderan the beautiful. Give me a cup. (*drinks*) You are sinners and I will sin with you. I will sin hard, my beauties. (*drinks*)

Anice-aljalice

Come now, I will sing to you, if you will give me a lute. I am a rare singer, Shaikh Ibrahim.

Ibrahim

(*drinks*)

There is a lute in yonder corner. Sing, sing, and it may be I will answer thee. (*drinks*)

Anice-aljalice

But wait, wait. To sing in this meagreness of light ! Candles, candles.

She lights the eighty candles of the great candelabrum

Ibrahim

(*drinks*)

Allah ! it lights thee up, my slavegirl, my jewel. (*drinks*)

Nureddene

Drink not so fast, Shaikh Ibrahim, but get up and light the lamps in the windows.

Ibrahim

(drinks)

Sin not thou by troubling the coolness of wine in my throat. Light them, light them but not more than two.

Nureddene goes out lighting the lamps one by one and returns in the same way. Meanwhile Shaikh Ibrahim drinks.

Ibrahim

Allah ! hast thou lit them all ?

Anice-aljalice

Shaikh Ibrahim, drunkenness sees but double, and dost thou see eighty-four ? Thou art far gone in thy cups, O adept, O Ibn Bata[†]ist.

Ibrahim

I am not yet so drunk as that. You are bold youths to light them all.

Nureddene

Whom fearest thou ? Is not the pavilion thine ?

Ibrahim

Surely mine ; but the Caliph dwells near and he will be angry at the glare of so much light.

Nureddene

Truly, he is a great Caliph.

Ibrahim

Great enough, great enough. There might have been greater if Fate had willed it. But 'tis the decree of Allah. Some He raiseth to be Caliphs and some He turneth into gardeners. *(drinks)*

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Anice-aljalice

I have found a lute.

Nureddene

Give it me. Hear me improvise, Old Sobriety.
(*Sings*) Saw you Shaikh Ibrahim the grave old man ?
Allah ! Allah ! I saw him drunk and drinking
What was he doing when the dance began ?
He was winking ; verily, verily, he was winking.

Ibrahim

Fie ! What cobbler's poetry is this ? But thou hast a touch. Let me hear thee rather.

Anice-aljalice

I have a song for you.

(*Sings*) White as winter is my beard,
All my face with wrinkles weird,
Yet I drink.
Hell-fire ? judgment ? who's afraid ?
Ibrahim would kiss a maid
As soon as think.

Ibrahim

Allah ! Allah ! Nightingale ! Nightingale !

Curtain

SCENE 3

The Gardens, outside the Pavilion

Haroun al Rasheed, Mesrour

Haroun al Rasheed

See, Mesrour; the Pavilion's all alight.
'Tis as I said. Where is the Barmeky ?

Mesrour

The Vizier comes, my lord.

Enter Jaafar

Jaafar

Peace be with thee,
Commander of the Faithful.

Haroun al Rasheed

Where is peace,
Thou faithless and usurping Vizier ? Hast thou
Filched my Bagdad out of my hands, thou rebel,
And told me nothing ?

Jaafar

What words are these, O Caliph ?

Haroun al Rasheed

What mean these lights then ? Does another Caliph
Hold revel in my Palace of all Pleasure,
While Haroun lives and holds the sword ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Jaafar

(*to himself*)

What Djinn

Plays me this antic ?

Haroun al Rasheed

I am waiting, Vizier.

Jaafar

Shaikh Ibrahim, my lord, petitioned me,
On circumcision of his child, for use
Of the pavilion. Lord, it had escaped
My memory, I now remember it.

Haroun al Rasheed

Doubly thou erredst, Jaafar, for thou gavest him
No money, which was the significance
Of his request, neither wouldst suffer me
To help my servant. We will enter, Vizier,
And hear the grave Faqueers discoursing there
Of venerable things. The Shaikh's devout
And much affects their reverend company.
We too shall profit by that holy talk
Which arms us against sin and helps to heaven.

Jaafar

(*to himself*)

Helps to the plague ! (*aloud*) Commander of the Faithful,
Your mighty presence will disturb their peace
With awe or quell their free unhampered spirits.

Haroun al Rasheed

At least I'd see them.

Mesrour

From this tower, my lord
We can look straight into the whole pavilion.

Haroun al Rasheed

Mesrour, well thought of !

Jaafar

(aside to Mesrour)

A blister spoil thy tongue !

Mesrour

(aside to Jaafar)

I'll head you, Jaafar.

Haroun al Rasheed

(listening)

Is not that a lute ?
A lute at such a grave and reverend meeting !

Shaikh Ibrahim sings within

Chink-a-chunk-a-chink !
We will kiss and drink,
And be merry, O very very merry.
For your eyes are bright
Even by candle light
And your lips as red as the red round cherry.

Haroun al Rasheed

Now by the Prophet ! by my great forefathers !

He rushes into the tower followed by Mesrour

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Jaafar

May the devil fly away with Shaikh Ibrahim and drop him upon a hill of burning brimstone !

*He follows the Caliph, who now appears with Mesrour
on the platform of the tower*

Haroun al Rasheed

Ho, Jaafar, see this godly ceremony
Thou gav'st permission for, and these fair Faqueers.

Jaafar

Shaikh Ibrahim has utterly deceived me.

Haroun al Rasheed

The aged hypocrite ! Who are this pair
Of heavenly faces ? Was there then such beauty
In my Bagdad, yet Haroun's eyes defrauded
Of seeing it ?

Jaafar

The girl takes up the lute.

Haroun al Rasheed

Now if she play and sing divinely, Jaafar,
You shall be hanged alone for your offence,
If badly, all you four shall swing together.

Jaafar

I hope she will play vilely.

Haroun al Rasheed

Wherefore, Jaafar ?

Jaafar

I ever loved good company, my lord,
And would not tread my final road alone.

Haroun al Rasheed

No, when thou goest that road, my faithful servant,
Well do I hope that we shall walk together.

Anice-aljalice

(*within*)

Song

King of my heart, wilt thou adore me,
Call me goddess, call me thine ?
I too will bow myself before thee
As in a shrine.
Till we with mutual adoration
And holy earth defeating passion
Do really grow divine.

Haroun al Rasheed

The mighty Artist shows his delicate cunning
Utterly in this fair creature. I will talk
With the rare couple.

Jaafar

Not in your own dread person,
Or fear will make them dumb.

Haroun al Rasheed

I'll go disguised.
Are there not voices by the river, Jaafar ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Fishermen, I would wager. My commands
Are well obeyed in my Bagdad, O Vizier !
But I have seen too much beauty and cannot now
Remember to be angry. Come, descend.

As they descend, enter Kareem

Kareem

Here's a fine fat haul ! O my jumpers ! my little beauties ! O your fine
white bellies ! What a joke, to catch the Caliph's own fish and sell them
to him at thrice their value !

Haroun al Rasheed

Who art thou ?

Kareem

O Lord, 'tis the Caliph himself ! I am a dead fisherman. (*falling flat*)
O Commander of the Faithful ! Alas, I am an honest fisherman.

Haroun al Rasheed

Dost thou lament thy honesty ?
What fish hast thou ?

Kareem

Only a few whitebait and one or two minnows. Poor thin rogues, all of
them ! They are not fit for the Caliph's honourable stomach.

Haroun al Rasheed

Show me thy basket, man.
Are these thy whitebait and thy two thin minnows ?

Kareem

Alas, sir, 'tis because I am honest.

Haroun al Rasheed

Give me thy fish.

Kareem

Here they are, here they are, my lord !

Haroun al Rasheed

Out ! the whole basket, fellow.

Do I eat live fish, you thrust them in my face ?

And now exchange thy outer dress with me.

Kareem

My dress ? Well, you may have it : I am liberal as well as honest. But 'tis a good gaberdine; I pray you, be careful of it.

Haroun al Rasheed

Woe to thee, fellow ! What's this filthiness

Thou call'st a garment ?

Kareem

O Sir, when you have worn it ten days, the filth will come easy to you and, as one may say, natural. And 'tis honest filth; it will keep you warm in winter.

Haroun al Rasheed

What, shall I wear thy gaberdine so long ?

Kareem

Commander of the Faithful ! Since you are about to leave kingcraft and follow an honest living for the good of your soul, you may wear worse than an honest fisherman's gaberdine. 'Tis a good craft and an honourable.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Haroun al Rasheed

Off with thee. In my dress thou'lt find a purse
Crammed full of golden pieces. It is thine.

Kareem

Glory to Allah ! This comes of being honest.

Exit

Jaafar

(coming up)

Who's this ? Ho, Kareem ! wherefore here tonight ?
The Caliph's in the garden. You'll be thrashed
And very soundly, fisher.

Haroun al Rasheed

Jaafar, 'tis I.

Jaafar

The Caliph ?

Haroun al Rasheed

Now to fry these fish and enter.

Jaafar

Give them to me. I am a wondrous cook.

Haroun al Rasheed

No, by the Prophet ! My two lovely friends
Shall eat a Caliph's cookery tonight.

Exeunt

SCENE 4

Inside the Pavilion

Nureddene, Anice-aljalice, Shaikh Ibrahim

Nureddene

Shaikh Ibrahim, verily thou art drunk.

Ibrahim

Alas, alas, my dear son, my own young friend ! I am damned, verily, verily, I am damned. Ah, my sweet lovely young father ! Ah, my pious learned white-bearded mother ! That they could see their son now, their pretty little son ! But they are in their graves; they are in their cold, cold graves.

Nureddene

Oh, thou art most pathetically drunk. Sing, Anice.

Outside

Fish ! fish ! sweet fried fish !

Anice-aljalice

Fish ! Shaikh Ibrahim, Shaikh Ibrahim ! hearest thou ? We have a craving for fish.

Ibrahim

'Tis Satan in thy little stomach who calleth hungrily for sweet fish. Silence, thou preposterous devil !

Anice-aljalice

Fie, Shaikh, is my stomach outside me, under the window ? Call him in.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibrahim

Ho ! ho ! come in, Satan ! come in, thou brimstone fisherman. Let us see thy long tail.

Enter Haroun

Anice-aljalice

What fish have you, good fisherman ?

Haroun al Rasheed

I have very honest good fish, my sweet lady, and I have fried them for you with my own hand. These fish,—why, all I can say of them is, they are fish. But they are well fried.

Nureddene

Set them on a plate. What wilt thou have for them ?

Haroun al Rasheed

Why, for such faces as you have, I will honestly ask nothing.

Nureddene

Then wilt thou dishonestly ask for a trifle more than they are worth. Swallow me these denars.

Haroun al Rasheed

Now Allah give thee a beard ! for thou art a generous youth.

Anice-aljalice

Fie, fisherman, what a losing blessing is this, to kill the thing for which thou blessest him ! If Allah give him a beard, he will be no longer a youth, and for the generosity, it will be Allah's.

Haroun al Rasheed

Art thou as witty as beautiful ?

Anice-aljalice

By Allah, that am I. I tell thee very modestly that there is not my equal from China to Frangistan.

Haroun al Rasheed

Thou sayest no more than truth.

Nureddene

What is your name, fisherman ?

Haroun al Rasheed

I call myself Kareem, and in all honesty when I fish, 'tis for the Caliph.

Ibrahim

Who talks of the Caliph ? Dost thou speak of the Caliph Haroun or the Caliph Ibrahim ?

Haroun al Rasheed

I speak of *the* Caliph, Haroun the Just, the great and only Caliph.

Ibrahim

Oh, Haroun ? He is fit only to be a gardener, a poor witless fellow without brains to dress himself with, yet Allah hath made him Caliph. While there are others—but 'tis no use talking. A very profligate tyrant, this Haroun ! He has debauched half the women in Bagdad and will debauch the other half, if they let him live. Besides, he cuts off a man's head when the nose on it does not please him. A very pestilence of a tyrant !

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Haroun al Rasheed

Now Allah save him !

Ibrahim

Nay, let Allah save his soul if He will and if 'tis worth saving, but I fear me 'twill be a tough job for Allah. If it were not for my constant rebukes and admonitions and predications and pestrigiddi—prestigidgide—what the plague ! pestidigitations, and some slaps and cuffs of which I pray you speak very low, he would be worse even than he is. Well, well, even Allah blunders; verily, verily !

Anice-aljalice

Will thou be Caliph, Shaikh Ibrahim ?

Ibrahim

Yes, my jewel, and thou shall be my Zobeidah. And we will tipple, beauty, we will tipple.

Haroun al Rasheed

And Haroun ?

Ibrahim

I will be generous and make him my under-kitchen-gardener's second vice-sub-under-assistant. I would gladly give him a higher post, but, verily, he is not fit.

Haroun al Rasheed

(laughing)

What an old treasonous rogue art thou, Shaikh Ibrahim !

Ibrahim

What ? who ? Thou art not Satan, but Kareem the fisherman? Didst thou say I was drunk, thou supplier of naughty houses ? Verily, I will tug thee by the beard, for thou liest. Verily, verily !

Nureddene

Shaikh Ibrahim ! Shaikh Ibrahim !

Ibrahim

Nay, if thou art the angel Gabriel and forbiddest me, let be, but I hate lying and liars.

Nureddene

Fisherman, is thy need here over ?

Haroun al Rasheed

I pray you, let me hear this young lady sing; for indeed 'twas the sweet voice of her made me fry fish for you.

Nureddene

Oblige the good fellow, Anice; he has a royal face for his fishing.

Ibrahim

Sing ! 'tis I will sing : there is no voice like mine in Bagdad.

(sings)

When I was a young man,
I'd a very good plan;
Every maid that I met,
In my lap I would set,
What mattered her age or her colour ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

But now I am old
And the girls they grow cold
And my heartstrings, they ache
At the faces they make,
And my dancing is turned into dolour.

A very sweet song ! a very sad song ! Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought. 'Tis just, 'tis just. Ah me ! well-a-day ! Verily, verily !

Anice-aljalice

I pray you, Shaikh Ibrahim, be quiet. I would sing.

Ibrahim

Sing, my jewel, sing, my gazelle, sing, my lady of kisses. Verily, I would rise up and buss thee, could I but find my legs. I know not why they have taken them from me.

Anice-aljalice

(sings)

Song

Heart of mine, O heart impatient,
Thou must learn to wait and weep.
Wherefore wouldst thou go on beating
When I bade thee hush and sleep ?
Thou who wert of life so fain,
Didst thou know not, life was pain ?

Haroun al Rasheed

O voice of angels ! Who art thou, young man,
And who this sweet-voiced wonder ? Let me hear;
Tell me thy story.

Nureddene

I am a man chastised
For my own errors, yet unjustly. Justice
I seek from the great Caliph. Leave us, fisherman.

Haroun al Rasheed

Tell me thy story. Walk apart with me.
It may be I can help thee.

Nureddene

Leave us, I pray thee.
Thou, a poor fisherman !

Haroun al Rasheed

I vow I'll help thee.

Nureddene

Art thou the Caliph ?

Haroun al Rasheed

If I were, by chance ?

Nureddene

If thou art as pressing with the fish as me,
There's a good angler.

Exit with Haroun

Anice-aljalice

Will you not have some of this fish, Shaikh Ibrahim ? 'Tis a sweet fish.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibrahim

Indeed thou art a sweet fish, but somewhat overdone. Thou hast four lovely eyes and two noses wonderfully fine with just the right little curve at the end; 'tis a hook to hang my heart upon. But, verily there are two of them and I know not what to do with the other. I have only one heart, beauty. O, Allah, Thou hast darkened my brain with wine, and wilt Thou damn me afterwards ?

Anice-aljalice

Nay, if thou wilt misuse my nose for a peg, I have done with thee. My heart misgives me strangely.

Enter Nureddene

Nureddene

He's writing out a letter.

Anice-aljalice

Surely, my lord,
This is no ordinary fisherman.
If 'twere the Caliph ?

Nureddene

The old drunkard knew him
For Kareem and a fisherman. Dear Anice,
Let not our dreams delude us. Life is harsh,
Dull-tinted, not so kindly as our wishes,
Nor half so beautiful.

Enter Haroun

Haroun al Rasheed

He is not fit
To be a King.

Nureddene

Nor ever was. 'Tis late.

Haroun al Rasheed

Givest thou no gift at parting ?

Nureddene

You're a fisher ! (*opens his purse*)

Haroun al Rasheed

Nothing more valuable ?

Anice-aljalice

Wilt take this ring ?

Haroun al Rasheed

No ; give me what I ask.

Nureddene

Yes, by the Prophet,
Because thou hast a face !

Haroun al Rasheed

Give me thy slavegirl.

(*There is a silence*)

Nureddene

Thou hast entrapped me, fisherman.

Anice-aljalice

Is it a jest ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Haroun al Rasheed

Thou sworeest by the Prophet, youth.

Nureddene

Tell me.

Is it for ransom ? I have nothing left
In all the world but her and these few pieces.

Haroun al Rasheed

She pleases me.

Anice-aljalice

O wretch !

Nureddene

Another time

I would have slain thee. But now I feel 'tis God
Has snared my feet with dire calamities,
And have no courage.

Haroun al Rasheed

Dost thou give her to me.

Nureddene

Take her, if Heaven will let thee. Angel of God,
Avenging angel, wert thou lying in wait for me
In Bagdad ?

Anice-aljalice

Leave me not, O leave me not.
It is a jest, it must, it shall be a jest
God will not suffer it.

Haroun al Rasheed

I mean thee well.

Anice-aljalice

Thy doing's damnable. O man, O man,
Art thou a devil straight from Hell, or art thou
A tool of Almuene's to torture us ?
Will you leave me, my lord, and never kiss ?

Nureddene

Thou art his ; I cannot touch thee.

Haroun al Rasheed

Kiss her once.

Nureddene

Tempt me not ; if my lips grow near to hers,
Thou canst not live. Farewell.

Haroun al Rasheed

Where art thou bound ?

Nureddene

To Bassora.

Haroun al Rasheed

That is, to death ?

Nureddene

Even so.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Haroun al Rasheed

Yet take this letter with thee to the Sultan.

Nureddene

Man, what have I to do with thee or letters ?

Haroun al Rasheed

Hear me, fair youth. Thy love is sacred to me
And will be safe as in her father's house.
Take thou this letter. Though I seem a fisherman,
I was the Caliph's friend and schoolfellow,
His cousin of Bassora's too, and it may help thee.

Nureddene

I know not who thou art, nor if this scrap
Of paper has the power thou babblest of,
And do not greatly care. Life without her
Is not to be thought of. Yet thou giv'st me something
I'd once have dared call hope. She will be safe ?

Haroun al Rasheed

As my own child, or as the Caliph's.

Nureddene

I'll go play
At pitch and toss with death in Bassora.

Exit

Ibrahim

Kareem, thou evil fisherman, thou unjust seller, thou dishonest dicer,
thou beastly womanizer ! hast thou given me stinking fish not worth

a dirham and thinkest to take away my slavegirl. Verily, I will tug thy beard for her.

He seizes Haroun by the beard

Haroun al Rasheed

(throwing him off)

Out ! Hither to me, Vizier Jaafar. *(Enter Jaafar)*. Hast thou my robe ?

He changes his dress

Jaafar

How dost thou, Shaik Ibrahim ? Fie, thou smellest of that evil thing, even the accursèd creature, wine.

Ibrahim

O Satan, Satan, dost thou come to me in the guise of Jaafar, the Persian, the Shiah, the accursèd favourer of Gnosticism and heresies, the evil and bibulous Vizier? Avaunt, and return not save with a less damnable face. O thou inconsiderate fiend ?

Haroun al Rasheed

Damsel, lift up thy head. I am the Caliph.

Anice-aljalice

What does it matter who you are ? My heart, my heart !

Haroun al Rasheed

Thou art bewildered. Rise ! I am the Caliph
Men call the Just. Thou art as safe with me
As my own daughter. I have sent thy lord
To be a king in Bassora, and thee
I will send after him with precious robes,
Fair slavegirls, noble gifts. Possess thy heart
Once more, be glad.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Anice-aljalice

O just and mighty Caliph !

Haroun al Rasheed

Shaikh Ibrahim.

Ibrahim

Verily, I think thou art the Caliph, and verily, I think I am drunk.

Haroun al Rasheed

Verily, thou hast told the truth, twice, and it is a wonder. But verily, verily, verily, thou shalt be punished. Thou hast been kind to the boy and his sweetheart, therefore I will not take from thee thy life or thy post in the gardens, and I will forgive thee for tugging the beard of the Lord's anointed. But thy hypocrisies and blasphemies are too rank to be forgiven. Jaafar, have a man with him constantly and wine before his eyes; but if he drink so much as a thimbleful, let it be poured by gallons into his stomach. Have in beautiful women constantly before him and if he once raise his eyes above their anklets, shave him clean and sell him into the most severe and Puritan house in Bagdad. Nay, I will reform thee, old sinner.

Ibrahim

Oh, her lips ! her sweet lips !

Jaafar

You speak to a drunken man, my lord.

Haroun al Rasheed

Tomorrow bring him before me when he's sober.

Exeunt

ACT V

Bassora and Bagdad

SCENE I

A room in Almuene's house

Almuene ; Fareed

Fareed

You'll give me money, dad ?

Almuene

You spend too much.
We'll talk of it another time. Now leave me.

Fareed

You'll give me money ?

Almuene

Go ; I'm out of temper.

Fareed

(dancing round him)

Give money, money, money, give me money.

Almuene

You boil, do you too grow upon me ? There. *(strikes him)*

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Fareed

You have struck me !

Almuene

Why, you would have it. Go.
You shall have money.

Fareed

How much ?

Almuene

Quite half your asking.
Send me a cup of water.

Fareed

Oh yes, I'll send it.
You'll strike me then ?

Exit

Almuene

Young Nureddene's evasion
Troubles me at the heart ; it will not dislodge.
And Murad too walks closely with the King,
Who whispers to him, whispers, whispers. What ?
Is't of my ruin ? No, he needs me yet.
And Ibn Sawy's coming soon. But there
I've triumphed. He will have a meagre profit
Of his long work in Roum,—the headsman's axe.

Enter a slave with a cup of water

Here set it down and wait. 'Tis not so bad.
I'll have their Doonya yet for my Fareed.

Enter Khatoon, dragging in Fareed

Khatoon

He has not drunk it yet.

Fareed

Why do you drag me,
You naughty woman ? I will bite your fingers.

Khatoon

O imp of Hell ! Touch not the water, Vizier.

Almuene

What's this ?

Khatoon

This brat whose soul you've disproportioned
Out of all nature, turns upon you now.
There's poison in that cup.

Almuene

Unnatural mother,
What is this hatred that thou hast, to slander
The issue of thy womb ?

Fareed

She hates me, dad.
Drink off the cup to show her how you love me.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Khatoon

What, art thou weary of thy life ? Give rather
The water to a dog and see.

Almuene

Go, slave,
And make some negro drink it off. (*Exit slave*). Woman,
What I have promised often, thou shalt have,—
The scourge.

Khatoon

That were indeed my right reward
For saving such a life as thine. Oh, God
Will punish me for it.

Almuene

Thou tongue ! I'll strike thee.

As he lifts his hand the slave returns

Slave

Oh, sir, almost before it touched his throat,
He fell in fierce convulsions. He is dead.

Almuene

Fareed !

Fareed

You'll strike me, will you ? You'll give half
My askings, no ? I wish you'd drunk it off;
I'd have rare spendings !

He runs out

Almuene

God !

Khatoon

Will you not scourge me ?

Almuene

Leave me.

Exit Khatoon

What is this horrible surprise,
Beneath whose shock I stagger ? Is my term
Exhausted ? But I would have done as much,
Had I been struck. It is his gallant spirit,
His lusty blood that will not bear a blow.
I must appease him. If my own blood should end me !
He shall have money, all that he can ask.

Exit

SCENE 2

The Palace in Bassora

Alzayni, Murad, Almuene, Ajebe

Alzayni

I like your nephew well and will advance him.
For what's twixt you and Murad, let it sleep.
You are both my trusty counsellors.

Almuene

A nothing,
I grieve I pressed; forget it, noble Murad.

Murad

That's as you please.

Almuene

Come, you're my nephew too.

Voice outside

Ho, Mohamad Alzayni, Sultan, Ho !

Alzayni

Who is that Arab ?

Almuene

(at the window)

God ! 'tis Nureddene.

Impossible !

Alzayni

Or he is courage-mad.

Almuene

'Tis he.

Murad

The devil and his unholy joy !

Alzayni

Drag him to me ! No, bring him quietly,
Ajebe.

Exit Ajebe

I wonder in what strength he comes.

Almuene

The strength of madness.

Murad

Or of Heaven, whose wrath
Sometimes chastises us with our desires.

Enter Ajebe with Nureddene

Nureddene

Greeting, Alzayni, King in Bassora.
Greeting, sweet uncle. Has your nose got straight ?
Ajebe and Murad, greeting. Here am I !

Alzayni

How dar'st thou come and with such rude demeanour ?
Knowst thou thy sentence ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Nureddene

Why, I bring a sentence too,
A fishy writing. Here it is. Be careful of it;
It is my die on which I throw for death
Or more than life.

Alzayni

A letter, and to me ?

Nureddene

Great King, 'tis from thy friend the fisherman,
He with the dirty gaberdine who lives
In great Bagdad on stolen fish.

Alzayni

Thinkst thou
That thou canst play thus rudely with the lion ?

Nureddene

If I could see the mane, I'd clutch at it.
A lashing tail is not enough. The tiger
Has that too, and many trifling animals.
But read the letter.

Alzayni

Read it, Almuene.

Almuene

'Tis from the Caliph, it appears. Thus runs
The alleged epistle; "Haroun al Rasheed,
Commander of the Faithful, known by name

To orient waters and the Atlantic seas,
Whom three wide continents obey, to Mohamad
The Abbasside, the son of Sulyman,
Men call Alzayni, by our gracious will
Allowed our subject king in Bassora,
Greeting and peace. As soon as thou hast read
Our letter, put from thee thy kingly robe,
Thy jewelled turban and thy sceptred pomp
And clothe with them the bearer Nureddene,
Son of thy Vizier, monarch in thy stead
In Bassora, then come to us in Bagdad
To answer for thy many and great offences.
This as thou hop'st to live."

Nureddene

It was the Caliph.

Alzayni

My mighty cousin's will must be obeyed.
Why turnst thou to the light ?

Almuene

To scan it better.
King, 'tis a forgery ! Where is the seal,
Where the imperial scripture ? Is it thus
On a torn paper mighty Caliphs write ?
Now on my life the fellow here has chanced
Upon some playful scribbling of the Caliph's,
Put in his name and thine and, brazen-faced,
Come here to bluster.

Ajebe

It was quite whole, I saw it.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Almuene

Boy, silence !

Ajebe

No, I will not. Thou hast torn it.

Almuene

Where are the pieces then ? Search, if thou wilt.

Alzayni

Ho, there.

Enter Guards

Take Ajebe to the prison hence.
He shall have judgment afterwards.

Exit Ajebe, guarded

Thou, fellow,
Com'st thou with brazen face and blustering tongue
And forgeries in thy pocket ? Hale him hence.
After fierce tortures let him be impaled.

Murad

Hear me, O King.

Alzayni

Thou art his sister's husband.

Murad

Yet for thy own sake hear me. Hast thou thought,
If this be true, what fate will stride upon thee
When Haroun learns thy deed ? whom doubt not, King,
Thy many enemies will soon acquaint.

Alzayni

Send couriers; find this out.

Almuene

Till when I'll keep
My nephew safe under my private eye.

Murad

Thou art his enemy.

Almuene

And thou his friend.
He will escape from thee once more.

Alzayni

Vizier,
Thou keep him, use him well.

Almuene

Ho ! take him, guards.

Enter guards

Nureddene

I lose the toss; 'tis tails.

Exit guarded

Alzayni

All leave me. Vizier,
Remain.

Exit Murad

Now, *Almuene* ?

Almuene

Kill him and be at rest.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Alzayni

If 'twere indeed the Caliph's very hand ?
Vizier, I dare not suddenly.

Almuene

Dare not !
Nay, then, put off thy crown at Haroun's bidding,
Who'll make thee his doorkeeper in Bagdad.
The Caliph ? How long will this drunken freak
Have lodging in his lordly mind ? Or fear'st thou
The half-veiled threat of thy own trusty Turk,
Sultan Alzayni ?

Alzayni

Him I'll silence. Keep
The boy ten days; then, if all's well, behead him.

Exit

Almuene

You boggle, boggle; that is not the way
To keep a crown. Have him and hold's the Vizier,
Catch him and cut's the General. Loose your grip ?
Let the hand shake ? So monarchs are unkinged.
Ten days are mine at least. I have ten days
To torture him, though Caliphs turn his friend.
Will God befriend him next ? My enemies
He gives into my potent hand. Murad is gone,
And I hold Doonya in my grip, Ameena too
Who, I have news, lives secret with her niece.
But where's the girl ? God keeps her for me, I doubt not,
A last sweet morsel. It will please Fareed.
But there's Haroun ! Why should he live at all,
When there are swords and poisons ?

Exit

SCENE 3

A cell in Almuene's house

Nureddene alone

Nureddene

We sin our pleasant sins and then refrain
And think that God's deceived. He waits His time
And when we walk the clean and polished road
He trips us with the mire our shoes yet keep,
The pleasant mud we walked before. All ill
I will bear patiently. Oh, better here
Than in that world ! Who comes ? Khatoon, my aunt !

Enter Khatoon and a slave

Khatoon

My Nureddene !

Nureddene

Good aunt, weep not for me.

Khatoon

You are my sister's child, yet more my own.
I have no other. Ali, mend his food
And treatment. Fear not thou the Vizier's wrath,
For I will shield thee.

Slave

I'll do it willingly.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Khatoon

What is this sound of many rushing feet ?

Enter Almuene and Slaves

Almuene

Seize him and bind. O villain, fatal villain !
O my heart's stringlet ! Seize him, beat to powder,
Have burning irons. Dame, what do you here ?
Wilt thou prevent me then ?

Khatoon

Let no man touch
The prisoner of the Sultan. What's this rage ?

Almuene

My son, my son ! He has burned my heart. Shall I
Not burn his body ?

Khatoon

What is it ? Tell me quickly.

Almuene

Fareed is murdered.

Khatoon

God forbid ! By whom ?

Almuene

This villain's sister.

Khatoon

Doonya ? You are mad. Speak slave.

A Slave

Young master went with a great company
To Murad's house to carry Doonya off,
Who then was seated listening to the lute,
With Balkis and Mymoona, Ajebe's slavegirls.
We stormed the house, but could not take the lady;
Mymoona with a sword kept all at bay
For minutes. Meantime the city fills with rumour,
And Murad riding like a stormy wind
Came on us just too soon, the girl defender
Found wounded, Doonya at last in Fareed's grip
Who made a shield of that fair burden; but Balkis
Ran at and tripped him and the savage Turk
Fire-eyed and furious lunged him through the body.
He's dead.

Khatoon

My son !

Almuene

Will you now give me leave
To torture this vile boy ?

Khatoon

What is his fault ?
Touch him and I acquaint the King. Vizier,
Thou slew'st Fareed. My gracious, laughing babe,
Who clung about me with his little hands
And sucked my breasts ! Him you have murdered, Vizier,

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Both soul and body. I will go and pray
For vengeance on thee for my slaughtered child.

Exit

Almuene

She has balked my fury. No, I'll wait for thee.
Thou shalt hear first what I have done with Doonya
And thy soft mother's body. Murad ! Murad !
Thou hast no son. Would God thou hadst a son !

Exit

Nureddene

Not upon others fall Thy heavy scourge
Who are not guilty. O Doonya, O my mother,
In fiercest peril from that maddened tyrant !

Curtain

SCENE 4

A house in Bassora

Doonya, Aameena

Doonya

Comfort, dear mother, comfort.

Aameena

Oh, what comfort ?

My Nureddene is doomed, Murad is gaoled,
We in close hiding under the vile doom
This tyrant King decrees.

Doonya

I did not think
God was so keen-eyed for our petty sins,
When great offences and high criminals
Walk smiling. But there's comfort, mother, yet.
My husband writes from prison. You shall hear.

(reads)

"Doonya, I have written this by secret contrivance. Have comfort, dry thy mother's tears. There is hope. The Caliph comes to Bassora and the King will release me for a need of his own. I have tidings of thy father; he is but two days journey from Bassora and I have sent him urgent and tremulous word to come, but no ill-news to break his heart. We have friends. Doonya, my beloved—"

That's for me only.

Aameena

Let me hear it.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Doonya

It is
Pure nonsense,—what a savage Turk would write.

Ameena

Therefore you kissed it ?

Doonya

Oh, you're comforted !
You're smiling through your tears.

Ameena

My husband comes.
He will save all. I never quite believed
God would forget his worth so soon.

Doonya

(*to herself*)

He comes,
But for what fate ? (*aloud*) True, mother, he'll save all.

Ameena

How is Mymoona ?

Doonya

Better now. She suffered
In our wild rapid flight. Balkis is with her.
Let's go to them.

Ameena

My son will yet be saved.

Exeunt

SCENE 5

Bagdad

A room in the Caliph's harem

Anice-aljalice with many slave-girls attending on her

Anice-aljalice

Girls, is he passing ?

A slave-girl

He is passing.

Anice-aljalice

Quick, my lute !

Song

The Emperor of Roum is great;
The Caliph has a mighty State;
But One is greater, to Whom all prayers take wing;
And I, a poor and weeping slave,
When the world rises from its grave,
Shall stand up the accuser of my King.

Girls, is he coming up ?

A slave-girl

The Caliph enters.

Enter Haroun and Jaafar

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Haroun al Rasheed

Thou art the slave-girl, Anice-aljalice ?
Why chosest thou that song ?

Anice-aljalice

Caliph, for thee.
Where is my lord ?

Haroun al Rasheed

A king in Bassora.

Anice-aljalice

Who told thee ?

Haroun al Rasheed

So it must be.

Anice-aljalice

Is there news ?

Haroun al Rasheed

No, strange ! Seven days gone by nor yet a letter!

Anice-aljalice

Caliph, high sovereign, Haroun al Rasheed,
Men call thee Just, Great Abbasside ! I am
A poor and helpless slavegirl, but my grief
Is greater than a King. Lord, I demand
My soul's dear husband at thy hand, who sent him
Alone, unfollowed, without guard or friend
To a tyrant Sultan and more tyrant Vizier,
His potent enemies. Oh, they have killed him !
Give back my husband to my arms unhurt

Or I will rise upon the judgment day
Against thee, Caliph Haroun al Rasheed;
Demanding him at that eternal throne
Where names are not received, nor earthly pomps
Considered. Then my frail and woman's voice
Shall ring more dreadful in thy mighty hearing
Than doom's own trumpet. Answer my demand.

Haroun al Rasheed

Anice, I do believe thy lord is well.
And yet—No, by my great forefathers, no !
My seal and signature were on the script,
And they are mightier than a thousand armies.
If he has disobeyed, for him 'twere better
He were a beggar's unrespected child
Than Haroun's kin;—the Arabian simoom
Shall be less devastating than my wrath.
Out, Jaafar, out to Bassora, behind thee
Sweeping embattled war; nor night nor tempest
Delay thy march. I follow in thy steps.
Take too this damsel and these fifty slavegirls,
With robes and gifts for Bassora's youthful king.
I give thee power o'er Kings and Emperors
To threaten, smite and seize. Go, friend, I follow
As swift as thunder presses on the lightning.

Exit

Jaafar

(to the slave-girls)

Make ready; for we march within the hour.

Exit

Curtain

SCENE 6

The public square^{of} of Bassora

Alzayani on a dais; in front a scaffold on which stand Nureddene, an Executioner, Murad and others. Almuene moves between the dais and scaffold. The square is crowded with people.

Executioner

Ho ! listen, listen, Moslems. Nureddene,
Son of Alfazzal, son of Sawy, stands
Upon the rug of blood, the man who smote
Great Viziers and came armed with forgeries
To uncrown mighty Kings. Look on his doom,
You enemies of great Alzayni, look and shake.

(Low, to Nureddene)

My lord, forgive me who am thus compelled,
Oh much against my will, to ill-requite
Your father's kindly favours.

Nureddene

Give me water;

I thirst.

Murad

Give water. Executioner,
When the King waves the signal, wait; strike not
Too hastily.

Executioner

Captain, I will await thy nod.
Here's water.

Almuene

(*coming up*)

Rebellious sworder ! Givest thou drink
To the King's enemies !

A voice in the crowd

God waits for thee,
Thou wicked Vizier.

Almuene

Who was that ?

Murad

Behead it. A voice.

Almuene

Mighty Sultan, give the word.

Alzayni

There is a movement in the crowd and cries.
Wait for one moment.

Almuene

It is Ibn Sawy
Oh, this is sweet !

Cries

Make way for the Vizier, the good Vizier. He's saved ! he's saved.

Enter Alfazzal; he looks with emotion at Nureddene, then turns to the King

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Ibn Sawy

Greeting, my King; my work in Roum is over.

Alzayni

Virtuous Alfazzal ! we will talk with the
As ever was our dearest pleasure; first,
There is a spotted soul to be dislodged
From the fair body it disgraced; a trifle
Soon ended. There behold the criminal.

Ibn Sawy

The crimial ! Pardon me, mighty King;
The voice of nature will not be kept down.
Why wilt thou slay my son ?

Alzayni

Nay, 'tis himself
Insisted obstinately on his doom;
Abused his King, battered and beat my Vizier,
Forged mighty Haroun's signature to wear
My crown in Bassora. These are the chief
Of his offences.

Ibn Sawy

If this thing is true,
As doubtless near inquiry in Bagdad—

Alzayni

Nay, take not up thy duties all too soon.
Rest from thy travel, bury thy dear son
And afterwards resume thy faithful works,
My Vizier

Ibn Sawy

I would not see my dear child slain.
Permit me to depart and in my desolate house
Comfort the stricken mother and his kin.

Alzayni

Perhaps a stone of all thy house may stand.
The mother and thy niece ? It hurts my heart.
They too are criminals and punished.

Ibn Sawy

God !

Alzayni

Slaves, help my faithful Vizier ; he will faint.

Ibn Sawy

Let me alone ; God made me strong to bear.
They are dead ?

Alzayni

Nay, a more lenient penalty.
What did I order ? To be led through Bassora
Bare in their shifts with halters round thair necks,
And, stripped before all eyes, whipped into swooning,
Then sold as slaves but preferably for little
To some low Nazarene or Jew. Was that
The order, Almuene ?

Ibn Sawy

Merciful Allah !

And it is done ?

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Alzayni

I doubt not, it is done.

Ibn Sawy

Their crime ?

Alzayni

Conspiring murder. They have killed
The son of Almuene. Good Ibn Sawy,
God's kind to thee who has relieved thy age
Of human burdens. Thus He turns thy thought
To His ineffable and simple peace.

Ibn Sawy

God, Thou art mighty and Thy will is just.
King Mohamad Alzayni, I have come
To a changed world in which I am not needed.
I bid farewell.

Alzayni

Nay, Vizier, clasp thy son,
And afterwards await within my hearing
Release.

Ibn Sawy

My Nureddene, my child !

Nureddene

Justice
Of God, thou spar'st me nothing. Father ! Father!

Ibn Sawy

Bow to the will of God, my son ; if thou
Must perish on a false and hateful charge,
A crime in thee impossible, believe
It is His justice still.

Nureddene

I well believe it.

Ibn Sawy

I doubt not I will join you, son. We'll hold
Each other's hands upon the narrow way.

Alzayni

Hast done, Alfazzal ?

Ibn Sawy

Do thy will, O King.

Alzayni

(*waving his hand*)

Strike.

Trumpets outside

What are these proud notes ? this cloud of dust
That rushes towards us from the north ? The earth
Trembles with horsehooves.

Almuene

Let this wretch be slain
We shall have leisure then for greater things.

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Alzayni

Pause, pause ! A horseman gallops through the crowd
Which scatters like wild dust. Look, he dismounts.

Enter a soldier

Soldier

Hail to thee, Mohamad Alzayni ! Greeting
From mightier than thyself.

Alzayni

What art thou, Arab ?

Soldier

Jaafar bin Barmak, Vizier world-renowned
Of Haroun, master of the globe, comes hither.
He's in your streets, Alzayni. Thus he bids thee:
If Nureddene, thy Vizier's son, yet lives,
Preserve him, Sultan, as thy own dear life ;
For if he dies, thou shalt not live.

Alzayni

My guards !

My soldiers ! here to me !

Soldier

Beware, Alzayni.
The force he brings could dislocate each stone
In Bassora within the hour and leave
Thy house a ruin. In his mighty wake
A mightier comes, the Caliph's self.

Alzayni

'Tis well.

I have but erred. My Murad, here to me !
Murad, thou shalt have gold, a house, estate,
Noble and wealthy women for thy wives.
Murad !

Murad

Erred, King, indeed who took a soldier
For an assassin. King, my household gem
I have saved and want no others. Were she gone,
Thou wouldst not now be living.

Alzayni

Am I betrayed ?

Murad

Call it so, King.

Alzayni

My throne is tumbling down.
The crowd quite parts, the horsemen drive towards us.

Almuene

Sultan Alzayni, kill thy enemies,
Then die. Wilt thou be footed to Bagdad,
Stumbling in fetters ?

Alzayni

They are here.

Enter Jaafar and soldiers

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Jaafar

This sight

Is thy own sentence. Mohamed Alzayni,
Allah deprived thee of reason to destroy thee,
When thou didst madly disobey thy lord.

Almuene

'Twas a mistake, great Vizier. We had thought
The script a forgery.

Jaafar

Issue of Khakan,
I have seen many Viziers like thyself,
But none that died in peace. Hail, Nureddene !
I greet thee, Sultan, lord in Bassora.

Nureddene

It is the second toss that tells, the first
Was a pure foul. I thank Thee, who hast only
Shown me the edge of thy chastising sword,
Then pardoned. Father, embrace me.

Ibn Sawy

Ah, child,

Thy mother and thy sister !

Murad

And in my care.

They are safe

Ibn Sawy

Nay, God is kind; this world
Most leniently ruled.

Jaafar

Sultan Alzayni, Vizier Almuene,
By delegated power I seize upon you,
The prisoners of the Caliph. Take them, guards.
I've brought a slave-girl for you, Nureddene,
The Caliph's gift.

Nureddene

I'll take her, if I like her.
Life is my own again and all I love.
Great are thy mercies, O Omnipotent !

Curtain

SCENE 7

The Palace in Bassora

Ibn Sawy, Ameenah, Nureddene, Anice-aljalice Doonya, Ajebe

Ibn Sawy

End, end embraces; they will last our life,
Thou dearest cause at once of all our woes
And their sweet ender ! Cherish her, Nureddene,
Who saved thy soul and body.

Nureddene

Surely I'll cherish

My heart's queen !

Anice-aljalice

Only your slave-girl.

Doonya

You've got a King,
You lucky child ! But I have only a Turk,
A blustering, bold and Caliph-murdering Turk
Who writes me silly letters, stabs my lovers
When they would run away with me, and makes
A general Turkish nuisance of himself.
'Tis hard, Sultan of Bassora great Sultan,
Grave high and mighty Nureddene ! thy sister
And subject—

Nureddene

Doonya, it is not Faeryland.

Doonya

It is, it is, and Anice here its queen.
A faery King of faery Bassora,
Do make a General of my general nuisance.
I long to be my lady Generaless
Of faery land, and ride about and charge
At thorns and thistles with a charming-stick,
With Balkis and Mymoona for my Captains—
They're very martial, King, bold swashing fighters !—

Nureddene

Ajebe our Treasurer.

Ajebe

To ruin you again?

Nureddene

We'll have Shaikh Ibrahim for Lord High Humbug
Of all our faeryland; shall we not, Anice ?

Ameena

What nonsense, children ! You a Sultan, child !

Nureddene

Your Sultan, mother, as I ever was.

Ibn Sawy

Let happiness flow out in smiles. Our griefs
Are ended and we cluster round our King.
The Caliph!

*Enter Haroun, Jaafar, Murad, Sunjar, guards with Alzayni
and Almuene*

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

The peace, Commander of the Faithful !

Haroun al Rasheed

Noble Alfazzal, sit. Sit all of you.
This is the thing that does my heart most good
To watch these kind and happy looks and know
Myself for cause. Therefore, I sit enthroned,
Allah's vicegerent, to put down all evil
And pluck the virtuous out of danger's hand.
Fit work for Kings ! not merely the high crown
And marching armies and superber ease.
Sunjar, Murad and Ajebe, you your King
Can best reward. But, Ajebe, in thy house
Where thou art Sultan, those reward who well
Deserve it.

Ajebe

They shall be my household queens,
Enthroned upon my either hand.

Haroun al Rasheed

'Tis well.

Sultan Alzayni, not within my realm
Shall Kings like thee bear rule. Great though thy crimes,
I will not honour thee with imitation,
To slay unheard. Thou shalt have judgment, King,
But for thy Vizier here, his crimes are open
And loudly they proclaim themselves.

Almuene

Lord, spare me.

Haroun al Rasheed

For some offences God has punished thee.

Shall I, His great Vicegerent, spare ? Young King
Of Bassora, to thee I leave thy enemy.

Almuene

I did according to my blood and nurture,
Do thou as much.

Nureddene

He has beguiled me, Caliph.
I cannot now pronounce his doom.

Haroun al Rasheed

Then I will.
Death at this moment ! And his house and fortune
Are to thy father due. Take him and slay.

Exeunt guards with Almuene

Let not his sad and guiltless wife be engulfed
In his swift ruin. Virtuous Alfazzal,—

Ibn Sawy

She is my wife's dear sister and my home
Is hers, my children will replace her son.

Haroun al Rasheed

All then is well. Anice, you're satisfied ?
I never was so scared in all my life
As when you rose against me.

Anice-aljalice

Pardon me !

THE VIZIERS OF BASSORA

Haroun al Rasheed

Fair children worthy of each other's love
And beauty ! till the Sunderer comes who parts
All wedded hands, take your delights on earth,
And afterwards in heaven. Meanwhile remember
That life is grave and earnest under its smiles,
And we too with a wary gaiety
Should walk its roads, praying that if we stumble,
The All-Merciful may bear our footing up
In His strong hand, showing the Father's face
And not the stern and dreadful Judge. Farewell.
I go to Roman wars. With you the peace !

Ibn Sawy

Peace with thee, just and mighty Caliph, peace.

Curtain

THE END

Exh 299³

Let not his sad and guiltless wife be engaged

In his cruel ruin? Virtuous Alpaggal, -

Ans.

She is my wife's dear sister and my home
Is hers, my children will replace her son
Till then is well. Princes, you're satisfied?
I never was so scared in all my life
As when you rose against me

Ans.

Pardon me!

Fair children worthy of each other's love
And beauty. Till the Sunderer comes who parts
All wedded hands, take your delights on earth,
And afterwards in heaven. Meanwhile remember
That life is grave and earnest under its smiles,
And we too with a wary gait
Should walk its roads, praying that if we stumble,
The All-Merciful may bear our footing up.
In His strong hand, showing the Father's face
And not the stern and dreadful Judge. Farewell!
I go to Roman wars. With you the peace,
Peace with thee, just and mighty Caliph, peace

Ans.

Curtain.

THE END.

The Vicars of Bassora.

a Romantic Comedy.

by Giovanni de Ghose.

Exh 299³
V18
hit 299³
27/4/08.
Add: 30.8.08.

APPENDIX

When Sri Aurobindo was taken into custody in connection with the Alipore Bomb Incident, all papers found on search in his house were seized by the police. These included many of his writings of the time when he was at Baroda. They had nothing to do with the case, but were indiscriminately put in evidence in the Court of Mr. L. Birley and were sent up as exhibits to the Court of Session. They form part of the records. Only some of the letters were referred to by the Counsel for the prosecution, and the defence had to give a reply. Possibly for this purpose, copies were taken and that is how some letters of Sri Aurobindo written to his wife came to be published. The other papers remained with the records. Sri Aurobindo, as it appears from his *Kara Kahini*, was not aware of this fact and regretted the loss of his manuscripts. The records of the case were liable to destruction in 1936 and were actually sorted out and made ready for delivery to the Contractor for the purchase of old papers, when the then Record-Keeper, Sri Jitendra Nath Ghosh Dostidar (the present Superintendent of my Office), contacted Sriji Chandra Bhushan Banerjee, a very senior Vakil, and pleaded with him to take some steps for the preservation of the records of the memorable Alipore trial. Sriji Banerjee interviewed Mr. Ellis, the District Judge at that time, and requested him not to destroy the records. Mr. Ellis felt embarrassed by the Rules and therefore advised the Record-Keeper to show the matter as destroyed but to keep it in some corner of the Record Room. The records thus remained unofficially for more than 12 years. In 1949, they were rescued from dusty oblivion and transferred to a steel cupboard, specially provided, in the Judge's own retiring room. The papers, tied in small bundles, filled up all the shelves of the big cupboard and a search made at that time to find out important documents, particularly Aurobindo's writings, proved futile. In May 1951, Professor Dr. Kalidas Nag casually told the writer that it was a matter of extreme regret that though the records had been saved the important papers required were not there. The idea at that time was that either the Police or the Political Department had taken them for some purpose or other. Sri Naresh Chandra Bose, Bar-at-Law, son of the late Atulya Charan

APPENDIX

Bose, Vakil, engaged for the Crown in the High Court, was then consulted, and he presented a set of paper-books kept in his father's library along with the records of the Bomb Case. The study of these books indicated a possible way of sorting the exhibits and a fresh attempt to search for the missing writings was made in the new light obtained and this effort bore fruit : almost all the writings of Sri Aurobindo brought into this case have been discovered. They include two complete dramas written in English.

After the find, the matter was reported to the Hon'ble Sri Niharendu Dutta Mazumdar, Minister, Judicial Department, Government of West Bengal, and he immediately proposed to publish some of the writings. The work of publication, however, has now been taken up by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.

August 1951

S. C. CHAKRABARTI
(*Judge, Alipore*)

मसूरी
MUSSOORIE

Acc. No.....

Please return this book on or before the date last stamped below.

[illegible]

822

Aur

अवाप्ति सं. 112116
ACC. No. 22110

वर्ग सं. पुस्तक सं.
Class No. Book No.
लेखक
Author. Aurbando, ... Sri.
शीर्षक
Title. The Viziers of Bassora.

निर्गम दिनांक Date of Issue	उधारकर्ता की सं. Borrower's No.	हस्ताक्षर Signature
--------------------------------	------------------------------------	------------------------

822

LIBRARY

22110

Aur

LAL BAHADUR SHASTRI

National Academy of Administration

MUSSOORIE

Accession No. 112116

1. Books are issued for 15 days only but may have to be recalled earlier if urgently required.
2. An over-due charge of 25 Paise per day per volume will be charged.
3. Books may be renewed on request, at the discretion of the Librarian.
4. Periodicals, Rare and Reference books may not be issued and may be consulted only in the Library.
5. Books lost, defaced or injured in any way shall have to be replaced or its double price shall be paid by the borrower.

Help to keep this book fresh, clean & moving